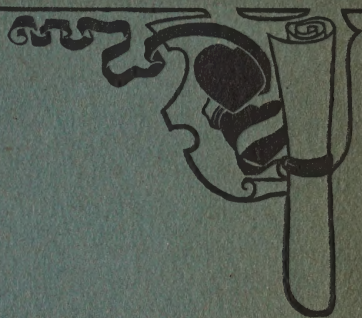


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LESLEY CHILTON

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By

ELIZA ORNE WHITE



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TO
M. O. K.

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LESLEY CHILTON

LESLEY CHILTON

I

TWO POINTS OF VIEW

"LESLEY, I do hope you won't publish that paper," said Mrs. Freeman as her niece stopped reading.

"Why not, Aunt Irene?"

"Because, of course you don't mean it so, but it is so — pronounced, and, forgive me dear, unfeminine. A man might have written it."

"That is the greatest compliment you could have paid me."

"But I don't mean it in that way, dear. It seems to me it is so much wiser if one has these new-fashioned views about women to keep them to one's self. Then there is no danger of their doing harm to others."

"But, dear Aunt Irene, you forget that my views seem as vital to me as your religion does to you."

"My dear, don't compare the two. I know you don't mean it so, but it is sacrilegious. It will grieve me very deeply if you publish that article."

The two women looked at each other in silence.

It was the never ending duel between the old and the young, between the timid and sheltered and the self-reliant and progressive.

Aunt and niece were a marked contrast. Mrs. Freeman was a frail, slight woman, with prematurely white hair, and with one of those refined faces that suggest the old-fashioned term of *gentlewoman*. Lesley was tall, and she had that overflowing vitality which acts as a magnet to those less fortunately endowed, while in addition to the charm of health and good spirits, there was a softness in her dark eyes that made one feel she had a nature not to be fathomed at once. She was often called beautiful, but her beauty was of coloring and expression rather than of line.

Lesley got up and, with a sigh, gathered the loose sheets of her essay together. She had written the paper in a tone of such moderation that she hoped it could not offend the most conservative reader. She had read it to her aunt to find out how it would strike a conventional woman of the old school, and she had discovered to her sorrow.

"What have I said that you think could do harm to any one?" she asked, with her hand on the door.

"I think it will all do harm," her aunt replied very gently. "Your doctrines, if acted on, would foster individualism and selfishness, and tend to weaken family ties, and to do away with self-abnegation and self-sacrifice."

"Aunt Irene!" The girl paused, trying to put

herself in touch with this other mind which was so hopelessly unlike her own, that it sometimes seemed as if they did not think in the same language.

"Surely, you don't believe that it is wrong to develop our best powers?" she asked.

"Of course not, dear; but a woman's power lies in the kingdom of home."

Her aunt paused in a contented way, as if she had said something as convincing as it was original.

"A great many women have no kingdom of home," Lesley objected. "And those who have can often do better work in it by going outside their own narrow rut part of the time. I wish I could make you see what I mean," she went on impetuously. "I feel that the world is such a glorious place to live in, so full of opportunities, for both men and women; and I am sure women, as well as men, are far better trained to do the world's work if they have the advantage a good education gives them. I enjoyed my own college life so much I want to make it easier for other girls to follow in my footsteps. Surely, Aunt Irene, you don't think that my four years in college have made me more selfish, and less interested in other people?"

Mrs. Freeman closed her eyes, and a faint color came into her cheeks. "My head is so tired, dear Lesley," she said. "An argument always uses me up for the day. I shall have to ask you not to say anything more on this subject."

Lesley closed the door with rebellion in her heart. Her aunt never met her fairly, in open combat. It was always an unequal contest, for although Lesley had the good fortune of youth and strength, her aunt's years and weakness gave her the crowning advantage of always having the last word.

Lesley went across the long hall to her own room. She glanced at a portrait by Stuart of her great-great-grandfather, Gilbert Lesley, an aggressive-looking man, and then at the companion picture of his wife, Dorothea, a pale, meek woman, in gray satin, who looked as if the life had been crushed out of her.

"Poor thing!" she thought compassionately, "how tiresome it must have been to be a woman in your day! How glad I am I was born in the last quarter of the nineteenth century!"

Lesley's room did not give an idea of her character, for Mrs. Freeman had stamped it with her own somewhat colorless personality. The wallpaper was white, with inconspicuous gilt figures, and there was a straw matting on the floor, and over this a green and white jute rug. The furniture was a new set of curled maple, and the bookcase, which had been made to order, was of curled maple also, and had a green and white silk curtain to keep out the dust. It was all charmingly feminine, and just what a girl coming home from college ought to have liked. The only trouble was that this especial girl preferred mahogany to curled

maple, and would have liked a red room instead of a green one. She hated the smell of a straw matting, and when she wanted a book in a hurry it tried her temper to have to stop to push back the silk curtain. Any one who knew her could have singled out her books from those her aunt had put in to fill up the shelves, and the pictures that she had brought back with her from college, looked, in their black frames, like black sheep in among Mrs. Freeman's Madonnas, framed in chestnut to match the woodwork. Each of the two women secretly thought that the other had done her best to spoil a charming room.

Lesley sank into an old-fashioned armchair covered with chintz, with a rosebud pattern, and looked out of the window at the placid landscape. It was only July, and this time there was not the prospect of a happy college year beginning in October, to help her to live through the long summer. Lesley's aunt had been strongly opposed to her going to college, but in spite of that Lesley had gone, forming there some of the closest friendships of her life, and coming out with her mental and moral horizon broadened; but she went to college four years ago, when her aunt was much stronger. Now Mrs. Freeman had reached the point of invalidism where she needed some other companion than the faithful Martha Gibson, who was housekeeper, cook, housemaid and adviser in one.

Across the way there stood an attractive square white house, with a green door and brass knocker.

A woman a little past fifty, whose black hair and high color made her look ten years younger than she was, came briskly out of the door and glanced up with her keen dark eyes at Lesley's window.

"Good-morning," she called out, in a high-pitched voice.

"Good-morning, Miss Cynthia. How is your mother?"

"Mother is only so-so, thank you. She has n't been well enough to see any one for the last two days, so I thought I would come over and pick up a little news. I hope you enjoyed your drive last night?"

"Very much, thank you."

"Did you go to Saunders Pond, or over Willard Hill?"

"Over Willard Hill."

"There, I said so. Mother thought you went to Saunders Pond, but I was sure you could n't get so many red lilies there. I hope your aunt was n't any the worse for the drive. Emma and I are afraid you are letting her go too far."

"It seemed to do her good."

"It is astonishing how that old brown mare of Nathan Hart's has spirited up since you came back. She is slower than cold molasses generally, but I noticed she held her head up and almost pranced last night."

"I am glad I have such an instantaneous effect, for it is the first time I have been to drive with Nathan Hart."

"Have you only been with the poor fellow once? How hard-hearted you are! Can you play duets with me this afternoon?"

"I can if I don't go to drive with my aunt."

"If you are not busy I'll come in for a minute now; I should n't dare face mother without bringing home some news."

As Lesley was getting ready to come down, Miss Ward stopped for a chat with Martha, who was sweeping the hall.

Martha was one of those ageless persons who look old when they are young, and, by way of compensation, always stay the same age. Trustworthiness and respectability were written all over her middle-aged face, and precision marked every outline of her neat black and white print gown.

"Good-morning, Martha," Miss Ward began. "How is Mrs. Freeman?"

"Nicely," said Martha, leaning her broom against the balusters and preparing for conversation.

"We had quite a scare yesterday when we saw Dr. Washburn go in. We were afraid she was worse."

"I guess you'll get a good fright if you worry every time the doctor comes," said Martha significantly. "There are other folks besides invalids at our house."

"I suspected so when I saw Mrs. Freeman going to drive later in the afternoon. There is considerable life in the neighborhood now. It makes it

very interesting for mother. You don't think Miss Lesley is letting Mrs. Freeman do too much? Mother has been worrying considerably about it lately."

"I hope Mrs. Ward won't have anything worse than that to worry about. Mrs. Freeman has come up just like a flower since Miss Lesley come home. Mrs. Freeman and her went down into the garden this morning and picked the sweet-peas."

"Well, it is good to get Miss Lesley back," Miss Ward said heartily. "She brightens us all up."

Every one in town loved Lesley, which was gratifying. The only trouble was that she had as pronounced a taste in people as in furniture. She thought it would be convenient to be made without decided views, for then life would have been equally amusing in any spot.

"It is bad for me to be first," she reflected, as she glanced hastily at herself in the mirror to make sure that her hair was smooth. Oh, to be away from it all! From the women with their petty gossip, and from the men who merely liked her surface attractions, from the quiet house, where she could seldom have her friends for fear of upsetting the placid ways of her gentle aunt's invalid life, and from the constant trivial interruptions that made it so hard to go on with her music and reading. Oh, to be free to travel to foreign countries, to live among superiors, to say what she thought without fear of being misunderstood!

It was not in Lesley's nature to be out of spirits for long together, and by the time she reached the parlor her mood had changed, and she found Miss Ward and her neighborhood gossip as amusing as light comedy.

That evening Mrs. Freeman and Lesley sat by the centre table with their books. They seldom liked the same literature, so they were never supposed to read aloud, but each was so anxious to make the other familiar with the choicest bits in her volume that she could not refrain from reading numerous extracts. There resulted a curious mixture. To-night it was a sandwich of "The Life of St. Francis of Assisi," with a mayonnaise of James's "Talks on Psychology and Life's Ideals."

Every now and then Mrs. Freeman glanced surreptitiously at her niece's dark head bending over her book, and at her charming figure in a white gown with a touch of red. When it was so late that they were sure of not being interrupted by callers, Mrs. Freeman put down her book.

"Lesley," she began nervously, "there is something I have been wanting to say to you ever since you came home, but we are both so reserved it is hard to speak of intimate, personal matters."

Lesley looked up with a winning smile that seemed to invite a confidence.

"When I die," Mrs. Freeman went on, "you will be very much alone in the world."

"Don't talk about that far-away time, Aunt Irene," and as she glanced at her delicate aunt

there was such a rush of affection in Lesley's heart, that she felt repaid a thousand-fold for her voluntary exile.

"You are young and attractive, dear," Mrs. Freeman continued, "and just now you think you have everything that life can give, but when you are my age, you will feel differently. It is better to be tied by love than to be free without it. Lesley, I wish I could see you happily married. Nathan Hart is such a good fellow," she added hesitating. "He is so unselfish. He would make the best and kindest of husbands. He always brings the sofa cushion one wants without one's asking for it. Most men never think of it, or else they flaunt the wrong cushion in your face in an irritating way."

"Yes, he is very thoughtful, and if I ever wanted sofa cushions I might consider him."

"My dear, the sofa cushion was merely a symbol." She paused, but continued presently, "Poor Nathan has cared for you so long; don't you think you could ever love him?"

"No," Lesley answered, with a sorrowful little shake of her head, that was more conclusive than the word itself.

"Then there is Dr. Washburn," Mrs. Freeman said tentatively.

"But, Aunt Irene, I could not fall in love with a widower, even if he had the intellect of Shakespeare, the goodness of St. Francis of Assisi, and the fascinations of — let me see — of Lohengrin."

"My dear, what a combination!"

"Fortunately I have n't any reason to think Dr. Washburn is in love with me," Lesley added lightly.

"My dear, you know he would be if you gave him the least encouragement. If you could look on like a dispassionate outsider" —

"Dear Aunt Irene, when were you ever a dispassionate outsider where I am concerned? There is one thing more I want to say about the matter you asked me not to mention again," she proceeded, with an abrupt change of subject, "and that is — I am going to publish that paper on the Higher Education of Women, at least unless you mind too much. I thought it only fair to tell you before I sent it off."

"Oh, Lesley, I am sure your grandfather would not approve, if he were here."

As Lesley's grandfather had died three years before she was born his approval was not a vital matter to her.

"My grandfather was a sensible man," she declared. "And I have faith enough in him to believe that if he were here now he would have broadened with the times, and would urge and entreat me to free my mind on the subject of women's education."

"Lesley, will you be serious one minute?"

"You don't like me when I am serious. I was serious enough when I wrote that paper."

"At least dear, if you are determined to publish

it, do, to please me, write under a nom-de-plume. It will make me so nervous if you get into a controversy under your own name."

Lesley considered a moment. "That seems like being afraid to take the consequences of what one has written," she said.

"No dear, it merely means that your aunt is afraid to have you take the consequences, and that your aunt is a nervous invalid who cannot bear any strain. For my sake, dear, please grant me this one favor."

Lesley stooped and kissed her aunt.

"I will publish the essay under a nom-de-plume," she said.

II

THE FATE OF THE ESSAY

"I WILL publish the essay," Lesley said confidently. She had never tried to publish anything before, and did not realize that the magazines might make it difficult for her to keep her word. Before long she had learned to say, "I will publish the essay if any one will take it."

The article went to Harper's first, and when it came back at the end of ten days she was cruelly disappointed, not realizing how much cause she had for gratitude, until another of the leading magazines kept her in suspense for six weeks, only to send her article back in the end, with a printed form.

Mrs. Freeman was divided between her fear that the heterodox paper would do harm if printed, and her indignation that her niece's talents were not appreciated.

It was early in October when Lesley took out a bulky envelope from the post office for the fourth time. Her heart sank. She was used to this sensation now. Nevertheless it always made her angry to think that such an insignificant matter as the return of a manuscript could give her a moment of such anguish.

"The Higher Education for Women has come

home for a brief vacation," Lesley said, as she took off her hat and gloves, and threw them down on her aunt's dressing-table. "I suppose you are glad."

"My dear, anything that makes you unhappy makes me unhappy. Lesley," as her niece was about to leave the room, "please don't leave your things here, and do open the envelope before you go. I want to know what the editor says. The personal note you had last time was a great advance."

Presently there came an eager exclamation. "Aunt Irene! He's taken it! Isn't it incredible! wonderful! He is a strong believer in woman's rights, and he has sent it back with the proof of an article on the other side, by a man, because he thinks I can rewrite part of my paper in answer to it. He thinks mine much the stronger. Do you hear, Aunt Irene? This wise, this marvelously sapient being thinks the paper of a woman is stronger than that of a man!"

"But, my dear, he is on your side. That may be one reason he thinks your paper stronger."

"How cruel of you! Now I am going to have the 'time of my life' demolishing this man's arguments! Good-by, you won't see me again until dinner."

"Do take your gloves and hat with you," her aunt entreated.

Presently Lesley reappeared.

"Aunt Irene, put down 'St. Francis,' you've

got to hear this, you 've simply got to. This man makes me so cross. Listen to this:—

“The writer at one time taught in a co-educational college, and to begin with was surprised by the greater quickness of the girl students, but as the months went on, he found that the men, who at first had seemed slow and plodding in comparison, had gained a more thorough knowledge of the subject. The girls had a surface familiarity with the text-book, but if you asked them questions that required the use of their minds, they showed they were not in the habit of thinking for themselves.’

“Is n’t that outrageous, Aunt Irene? I should like to have him come to Renton, and see if he found the men here so vastly superior to the women. And even if what he says is true of some girls, I don’t see why it affects the question of college education for women. Those same girls, if they had n’t gone to college, would have been repeating fluently the ideas gained from their brothers and friends. Is n’t it better for a girl to get book knowledge, for which she has to work, than to assimilate, without an effort, the ideas of the commonplace men around her?”

“It may be better for the girl’s mind, dear, but it is not nearly so agreeable for the men, as to have her echoing all their ideas. The old-fashioned woman, the woman who felt, whose intuitions were strong, had a charm which the modern girl does not possess.”

“Thank you, Aunt Irene.”

"My dear, you are an exception. You would be charming to men no matter what you did."

"Aunt Irene, you talk as if to charm men were the one object of a woman's existence. Now I look at it like this. The world is a place where men and women are forced to live for a period of years. It is not an ideal spot, but it is interesting, and it might be more ideal if we chose to make it so. The capacity in each human soul differs, it is true, but there are possibilities in all of us that are so ugly we shudder when we think of them, and others that are so glorious there are moments when we hope to revolutionize the world. If men and women can only learn to be good comrades, to work together as friend to friend, then the regeneration of the world would begin."

"But you are leaving romance out of the question, Lesley. You would have a very cut-and-dried world if men looked at women merely as good comrades."

"Let romance go, then," said Lesley, with a wave of her hand, "and let an ideal friendship take its place."

"In theory it might go, but in practice it would not. The first woman with a pair of eyes like yours, my dear, when she undertook to be an ideal friend to a man, would soon have him falling in love with her — you know that is what has happened to you more than once. You begin in this frank way, and then" —

"Surely it is n't my fault, Aunt Irene. I do so

like their friendship. Have I got to be stiff and cold to every man I see, for fear if I am nice to him he may some time fall in love with me? I could n't be so conceited."

"I am getting tired, dear," said Mrs. Freeman. "We will postpone the discussion for to-day."

"But I must read you this one thing. No, it's very long, I won't stop to read it if you are tired. He thinks the majority of college girls look older than their years and lose their freshness early, which shows that they are overworked. Look at me! I ought to travel around the country as an example of what a college woman may be, in point of health. He thinks it bad and unsettling for girls to be away from home for four years; he thinks" —

"In short, Lesley, he agrees with me perfectly. He is a sensible man. What is his name?"

"Henry Bowen Northbrook," Lesley said, glancing at the signature. "His very name is cut and dried. I know just what he is like, a cranky unmarried college professor of fifty, who is in a narrower rut than any woman ever was in, because a woman has ingenuity enough to get variety somehow. He is tremendously opposed to Woman's Suffrage, of course, and, although he believes in colleges for women, so far as I can find out, he thinks no woman should ever go to one; he says" —

"Lesley," begged her aunt, putting her hand to her head, "there are moments, only moments, my dear, when I wish you had been born deaf and dumb."

III

AN IMPROMPTU PICNIC

"WHERE are you and Amy going, Lesley dear?" her aunt asked, as Lesley and her friend Amelia Madison prepared to leave the house. It was some days since the return of the manuscript, an interval which had been spent industriously by its author.

"We are going to walk over to Saunders Pond."

"I thought that looked like your manuscript."

"It is. I have promised to read it to Amy when we get there."

"Oh, Lesley, do stay at home and read it. I should like to hear it again."

"Dear Aunt Irene, you 've heard it three times, already. I am going to spare you to-day," and Lesley walked out of the room before her disappointed relative had a chance to say anything more.

"Aunt Irene never seems to realize that occasionally one likes to have one's friends to one's self," she said, as they left the house. "She is social, dear Aunt Irene, and then she loves you very much."

"She does n't begin to love me as all my family love you, and as there are seven of us" —

"Hullo, Lesley," and a small girl swung herself down from an apple tree and landed at her friend's

feet. It was Amy's youngest sister, Caroline, a child of eleven. "Where are you going?"

"For a long walk, dear."

"Guess I'll go along too."

"Not to-day. Lesley is going to read me something you would find very stupid."

"Guess I'll walk part way with you," said the child. "Have a bite?" and she handed Lesley a rosy apple, with a large piece gone. "No, not such a big bite, I didn't mean for you to take such a big bite!"

"Hullo, Lesley." It was a boy this time, Amy's youngest brother, Theodore. "Where you going?"

"For a walk."

"Where to?"

"Saunders Pond."

"How bully! We'll have lots of fun."

"We are not going to have any fun," said his sister. "Lesley is going to read aloud something very stupid."

("Thank you, dear.")

"We'll go along just the same, and Caroline and I will play while you are reading."

Amy looked at Lesley doubtfully.

"Let them come," Lesley replied, for she could never bear to deny a child anything. Their numbers were soon increased by the Palfrey twins, and just before they reached Saunders Pond, Dr. Washburn and his little boy drove towards them. The child looked at them eagerly and said some-

thing to his father. The doctor was a big, blond young man with a healthy color, and a pair of attractive gray eyes. He bowed stiffly and smiled pleasantly. He was shy, but his shyness never passed for hauteur, for there was a genial atmosphere about him which suggested that he would like to be friends with you if he only knew how. He did not have much time for general society, for he was wrapped up in his profession and in the care of his little boy.

"Hullo, Paul. Want to go to Saunders Pond?" the children shouted.

The child leaped out of the buggy, while it was still in motion.

"Is it a picnic? May n't I come?" Dr. Washburn asked, drawn on by Lesley's cordial greeting.

"It is n't a picnic. It is just an accidental gathering."

"I see. You always make me think of the Pied Piper, Miss Chilton. I shall have to call you the Pied Piperess."

"On account of my faded bicycle skirt, I suppose," said Lesley perversely.

"Miss Chilton, how could you think I meant such a rude thing!"

"I did n't," she said, with one of her bright smiles, as she waved a good-by to him.

"You don't allow grown-up people to come too?" the doctor inquired with hesitation.

Lesley shook her head.

"Amy is grown up," said Caroline.

"Of course," said the doctor, "I did n't mean — I did n't notice" —

"We should be charmed to have you come," said Lesley, "if only I was n't going to read aloud something to Miss Madison that she has justly characterized as very stupid. If you will take the children off to the other side of the pond and keep them there for two solid hours you may come."

The doctor laughed, murmured something about a patient and drove on.

Lesley gave a sigh of relief, while Amy had a pang of disappointment as he left them. Amy was short and plump, and she was plain, except when seen by the eye of friendship. She dressed in uninteresting grays and browns, and her gowns had no charm but that of neatness. Her brown hair was arranged with severe simplicity, and her attitude was one of unobtrusive apology. Having frankly admitted that she was unattractive she troubled herself no further about the matter, but threw herself into other people's joys and sorrows with an abandon that a self-absorbed nature does not know. And consequently there was a charm about her, hard to describe, but very real.

"I was dreadfully afraid we could n't get rid of the doctor," said Lesley.

"If you want to get rid of people, dear, you don't go about it in the right way," Amy returned. "Now I never have any trouble in that line. Don't you like Dr. Washburn?"

"Yes, but I had set my heart on reading my

paper to you. Besides, I can never get at the doctor. He is superb in a sick room, but he has n't a word to say out of it."

"Possibly" —

"I know what you are going to say. Possibly I don't give him any chance. Somebody has to talk, and as he seems to prefer that I should, I skim along over the surface, and he laughs at everything I say and we never get any further. Very likely he is thinking all the time, 'What nonsense Lesley Chilton talks!'"

"You know he does n't think that. I am sure he likes you better than any girl he knows. I have seen a good deal of him, we have had so much sickness at our house, and he and father always have most interesting talks. Once or twice he has confided his worries about Paul to me, although he never notices me the rest of the time any more than if I were a piece of furniture."

They reached Saunders Pond a little later, and Lesley immediately forgot Dr. Washburn. It was a glorious autumn day, and Lesley, always sensitive to natural beauty, found it hard to give her mind to the reading of her paper. The pond glimmered lazily in the afternoon sunlight, while around its shores was a thick fringe of pines and hemlocks, broken here and there by a flaming red maple, or a brilliant yellow one. There were chestnut trees too, more sedate in coloring, but far more interesting in the eyes of the children. Lesley incautiously settled herself at the foot of a

chestnut tree and began to read. She had a voice that is remembered with the same delight with which one recalls a beautiful face. As Amy watched her changing expression, the glow on her cheeks, the light in her eyes, a certain careless grace, and a fullness of satisfaction with life she thought ; "If I were Dr. Washburn I should simply insist on her marrying me." Amy took such pleasure in the tones of her friend's voice that she found it hard to listen critically.

"Shall we women, who come from luxurious homes, and have been trained in colleges, go back into the world and resume our sheltered lives, without a thought given to the other women, who are forced to toil on in the same old, narrow conditions?" Lesley read.

"Lesley, when you read in that moving voice, you make me feel as if I must immediately leave my father and mother and brothers and sisters, because nothing in life is worth while if one has n't a college education."

"Dear old Amy! You know a lot more than I do, even if you have n't been to college. I am not talking of women like you!"

"Is it finished?" inquired a boy's voice above Lesley's head, while a shower of chestnut burrs descended into her lap.

"Finished! I've only read four pages."

"Theodore, be careful," Amy warned. "You almost hit her face that time."

"Oh, do come up into this tree, Lesley, and

play with us, there is a fine house here," Caroline called down.

"Children, run over to the other side of the pond," Amy said, trying to speak severely.

They did not mind her, and she had not expected that they would, but she was always buoyed up by a faint hope that they might.

Lesley felt very frivolous at having her thoughts distracted from the great cause by a chestnut tree, a group of merry children and an October afternoon. At the moment she wished she were a gypsy, or that she could live in a tree like the squirrels, and never look at a book, or think of any serious problem. She finished her essay, however, and asked Amy what she thought of it.

Amy hesitated. "It is very interesting," she said at last, "but I feel somehow as if you had not quite done justice to men."

"Justice to men! I am not writing a paper on the Higher Education of Men! I'll leave that until next time, and I could say a great deal on the subject too."

"You don't say anything about a woman's education being only a stepping stone to her making a better wife and mother," Amy ventured.

"Because I am tired of that everlasting talk about a woman being regarded merely as a wife and mother. I believe that a higher education will make her better fitted for any position in life."

"Is the old thing finished at last?" Theodore inquired. "Don't talk any more. You must play with us now."

"That," said Lesley with a smile, "is the position all of your sex take with regard to women."

At this juncture Dr. Washburn drove up, with a basket full of sandwiches, pears and gingerbread, and the news that he had stopped to notify Lesley's aunt and Amy's mother that the little party would take their tea out of doors. He thawed in the genial company in which he found himself and laughed at everything Lesley said, even going the length of telling some funny stories himself.

When it was time to go home Dr. Washburn said, "I can take one of you young ladies back with me, Paul would rather walk home with the boys," — he looked at Lesley as he spoke, and added, "you will get there much quicker, if you are afraid your aunt will need you."

"Thank you, Aunt Irene won't worry as long as she knows where I am. I would rather walk, but Miss Madison has to get home early for a Guild meeting this evening."

The doctor stiffened perceptibly, and said he should be very glad to take Miss Madison.

Amy hesitated, then as Lesley urged her to go, she climbed into the buggy in a deprecating way. "I am very sorry Lesley preferred to walk," she said apologetically.

The shy doctor felt so at ease in comparison with his shyer companion that he was able to laugh. "You are very flattering to me, Miss Amy," he said. "I am sorry for you, but you will have to make the best of a bad half hour."

Amy felt that the doctor was not only bitterly disappointed, but hurt by Lesley's refusal to drive back with him. She cast about in her mind for some topic which would prevent his being bored as well.

"Isn't it delightful to have Lesley at home?" she said. "Did you ever know any one who gave color so to every place?"

"She is very charming."

"When I am tempted to feel that life isn't worth living," Amy went on, "that it is mostly work, care, worry and sorrow, I think of Lesley, and it is as if a whole chorus of birds were singing, and a garden of flowers blooming. Lesley is the answer to all my doubts."

"You are very fortunate to have her for a friend. But do you feel sometimes that life is mostly work and sorrow? I hadn't thought a woman, a young woman in such a happy home as yours, could have that feeling. I should think life would always seem worth while to you, you are so necessary at home."

"Everybody is necessary at home. I should like to be necessary outside, too, like Lesley. I feel as if she had such a rich life ahead of her."

"In what way do you think it is going to be rich?"

"I don't think she knows just what she wants to do, and of course at present she is tied, but she is the sort of woman who will always have great influence, for everybody loves her, and then her

music gives so much pleasure. Do you believe in woman's suffrage, Dr. Washburn?"

"I am afraid I don't. I have never given the matter much thought. Between ourselves it seems to me a very tiresome and unimportant issue."

"That is the way I feel," she confessed, "but I don't dare say so. I am afraid we shall have to believe in it, sooner or later, if we want to stand well with Lesley."

The half-hour's talk that followed was long remembered by Amy as one of her keenest pleasures. It seemed incomprehensible to her that Lesley should be so rich that she could afford recklessly to fling away such moments. Amy's own life had been colorless, and this confidential talk that seemed to mark the possible beginning of a matter of fact friendship was such a joy to her that for the time, she ceased to long for Lesley's popularity.

IV

THE SUFFRAGE CLUB

EARLY in the winter Lesley's essay, signed by the modest nom-de-plume, Ann Smith, came out in "The School and the State."

Lesley's aunt could not but feel a sense of flatness when the article appeared, not only without attracting a single word of comment from the newspapers, but also without being discovered by any of her friends. This last oversight she hastened to rectify. Mrs. Freeman introduced the subject one afternoon when Mrs. Madison, Amy's mother, was calling on her.

"Have you read a clever article in 'The School and the State,' on The Higher Education of Women?" she asked.

"I never heard of 'The School and the State.' What is it? A new magazine?"

"Yes, you ought to take it, for really" —

"Don't tell me about a new magazine — our house is flooded with them; the judge insists upon taking them all."

"I could lend you the magazine," Mrs. Freeman suggested. "I don't agree with the essay, but it really puts the cause of the higher education of women very clearly. You are so interested in

these subjects, Amelia, that I am sure you will appreciate it."

"Irene Freeman," and Mrs. Madison gave her friend a penetrating glance, "what on earth has made you suddenly so interested in the higher education for women? Did Lesley write the article?"

"Ann Smith wrote it. Lesley is interested in the magazine. We have just begun to take it," said Mrs. Freeman, easing her conscience by a mental resolution to become a regular subscriber. "Last month there was a very sensible article on the other side, by a college professor, answered most cleverly I must say, although I don't agree with her, by this Ann Smith."

Mrs. Madison took the two numbers of "The School and the State," home with her, confirmed in her suspicions concerning the authorship. She was a believer in Woman, spelled with a capital W, the only advanced member in her family, and therefore she was pleased with Ann Smith's views, although they were a little too conservative to suit her.

"Somebody has written a very clever article, Tom, on the woman question," she informed her husband; "I think it is your friend Lesley Chilton."

"Well, what do you want me to do about it?" the judge inquired irritably. "I hate the whole business. You don't expect me to read the confounded stuff?"

"It is very bright, father," said Amy, "it has almost converted me."

"Amy," said her father with an indulgent smile, "you are the most wobbly person, you are always sitting on the fence."

He read the article with sundry impatient comments, and then flung the magazine down on the table.

"Lesley Chilton is a charming girl," he observed, "but damn her theories."

Fortunately for Lesley few of her friends shared the old lawyer's extreme views. Indeed so totally unexpected are the events of life that Lesley's modest paper on the higher education of women, published in an obscure magazine, was the innocent means of forming a suffrage club in Renton. No one could have been more surprised by this turn of events than the author, who, while she believed in woman's suffrage ardently, had never as yet troubled herself personally about the matter. But the Suffrage Club was formed, and when Mrs. Madison asked Lesley to become the secretary she could not refuse, although she grudged the time the meetings would take, in these beautiful winter days, when the snow might come at any moment and put an end to golf and bicycling.

The first meeting of the Suffrage Club was held in Mrs. Madison's pleasant parlors. There was an atmosphere of cheery content about these sunny rooms. The back parlor was lined with bookcases filled with shabby volumes, and it was redolent

with a faint odor of tobacco smoke. The green carpet was faded, and the old mahogany furniture looked as if it had borne complacently the attacks of five young Madisons. There were traces that both rooms were lived in by the whole family. Mrs. Madison's work basket stood side by side with Amy's, on a table in the sitting-room that was piled with the newest magazines, and the old-fashioned square Chickering piano in the front parlor was hospitably opened and some music spread invitingly on the piano rack. All sorts and conditions of chairs, from the judge's leather armchair down to some straight-backed chestnut bedroom chairs were waiting to receive the company. Mrs. Fairbanks, an imposing personage in a dark green broadcloth suit, selected the leather armchair, and then, finding it sloped too much, made timid little Mrs. Palfrey change seats with her. Amy took the piano stool, and Lesley sat next her, in a straight-backed old-fashioned chair that was too rickety to be occupied by a random guest. The rest of the club chose their seats with equal regard to their dispositions.

There was not much enthusiasm over the suffrage cause in town, but that made it all the more interesting a field for Mrs. Madison. She was an attractive woman, with the magnetism of a warm and whole-souled personality. Most of her listeners had not even heard the old, stock arguments, so that Lesley had a certain curiosity as to what their answers would be when their president asked

them if they liked to be classed with idiots, criminals, the insane and minors.

"I suppose," said Miss Cynthia Ward, as she surveyed the company, who were for the most part frankly middle-aged, "that we should none of us object to being classed with minors."

"I wonder if you ladies are familiar with the laws concerning the property of married women in this state?" Mrs. Madison continued, undaunted by Miss Ward's frivolity.

Lesley looked around the room at the audience, chiefly composed of maiden ladies to whom the laws concerning the property of married women did not seem of pressing interest. At this moment she caught sight of Caroline's doll, who had been accidentally left in a corner, and who was staring at the company with that sphinx-like expression of countenance peculiar to her race. It was as if a symbol of the eternal woman had been set in their midst.

"Do you realize what a tyrant the law will allow a husband to be?" asked Mrs. Madison.

"I am so glad I have n't any husband," murmured the irrepressible Miss Ward.

"Cynthia!" remonstrated her serious-minded sister Emma.

"I don't know what you suffragists mean by speaking so of husbands," complained Mrs. Fairbanks, in her aggressive way. "My husband always lets me do just as I please. He was perfectly willing to let me put that new bow-window into the parlor, although he did not want it himself."

"I am anxious to make an addition to my house in the spring, if Caleb does n't object, and he always lets me do as I like," said Mrs. Greeley. "Do you think Grant is cheaper than Brown?"

"I always employ Brown," said Mrs. Fairbanks, as if that settled the question.

"Grant is just as good, and he is a great deal cheaper," said Miss Cynthia Ward. "Mother has tried them both and she knows."

"Ladies, will you please come to order?" Mrs. Madison begged. "I want to tell you about the property laws for married women in Massachusetts." At this point she opened a thin brown volume and began to read from it. "Do you realize," she said, "'If a rich girl marries a poor man and puts her money to his credit in the bank, her dresses, jewels, furniture, etc., although bought with her money, having been purchased 'upon his credit,' are his property?'"

"I have n't any money," said Mrs. Greeley, "every cent I have is Caleb's."

"I always have my account at the bank in my own name," said Mrs. Fairbanks, "not that it would make a particle of difference, Mr. Fairbanks is so fair-minded."

"I am not speaking of ourselves," said Mrs. Madison, "but of women throughout the country, not only the wives of the prosperous, but the wives of working men and drinking men. What we want is better laws for them, and we believe that woman's suffrage will give them to us."

"The wives of working men and drinking men aren't burdened with many horses and jewels," said Miss Ward in an aside to Lesley. "If this won't be a rich scene to describe to mother!"

Mrs. Madison went on to give an instance of the unfairness of the law in case a working woman put her earnings in a common fund with her husband's and he chose to claim them, and then she read further extracts from her book. The ladies were not so much impressed as she could have wished, but here and there she had an intelligent listener like Lesley. The moment Mrs. Madison stopped reading the hum of conversation began.

"Ladies," she entreated, "please don't all talk at once. I am sure what each of you has to say will be of interest to us all."

"I am not so sure of that," Miss Ward whispered to Lesley.

"We shall be glad to hear any arguments on the other side," Mrs. Madison said courteously.

"I think it would be very unsexing to vote," Mrs. Fairbanks stated in her bold, masculine voice.

"I must confess I should rather like it," said gentle little Mrs. Palfrey, from the depths of the leather armchair. She seemed frightened at the sound of her own voice and shrank from Mrs. Fairbanks's hostile glance.

"I am sure the effect on men would be bad if we were to vote," Mrs. Fairbanks continued. "A Boston friend of mine was telling me the other

day how much less often men get up in the electric cars for women now. It is all a part of the woman movement. If we had equal rights with men all the old-fashioned courtesy would disappear."

"Caleb says the bill for having electrics in town has come up again," Mrs. Greeley remarked. "I shall never ride in them if they are put in. They will completely spoil our pretty streets."

"It is all very well for you to talk, Agnes," said Miss Ward, "but if you didn't have a carriage you would find electric cars very convenient. I wish we had them. I would cheerfully stand up any time and let Mr. Greeley sit down."

"Don't you see, ladies, how convenient it would be if we were able to vote on this question?" Mrs. Madison asked.

"I shall tell Caleb I will never speak to him again, if he does n't do everything he can to defeat the proposition," said Mrs. Greeley.

"But we do not all of us have a Caleb," Lesley could not refrain from observing.

"You are all of you so personal," Mrs. Madison said impartially. "It is not a question of individuals, but principles. Is it, or is it not best that we should be treated like human beings, and stand on an equal footing with men? The fact that my husband, though diametrically opposed to me on the woman question, yet is glad to have me go ahead and work for woman's suffrage, does not alter my views in the least, or make me unable to realize the fact that my chorewoman's husband beats her."

"Does he?" asked Mrs. Greeley in horror-stricken tones.

"I was talking of a hypothetical chorewoman," said Mrs. Madison with dignity, while her daughter Amy disgraced herself by burying her face in her handkerchief.

"Oh," said Mrs. Greeley, much relieved. "I thought if Joe O'Connor had taken to beating his wife I should expect Caleb to beat me next."

"Speaking of the O'Connors," said Mrs. Fairbanks; "I wonder if you would give Mrs. O'Connor up next Monday, Mrs. Greeley? I want her very much, as I am giving a dinner."

"The meeting is adjourned," said Mrs. Madison, tapping on the table. "We shall meet a fortnight from to-day with Miss Chilton. But before you go home I hope every woman here will sign this petition, asking the legislature to grant municipal suffrage to women. Miss Ward, will you sign before you go?"

"Emma and I promised mother we would n't sign any petition, mother is very much opposed to woman's suffrage."

That evening at tea time as Lesley was giving her aunt a spirited account of the meeting, Martha, who was waiting on table, gave several significant nods. No maid could be more irreproachable in her aloofness when company was present than Martha, but when Mrs. Freeman and her niece were alone Martha often relaxed and became a member of the family.

"Martha," said Lesley, as she caught an expressive glance, "what do you think about the suffrage question?"

"Well," said Martha, "if women want to vote just to amuse themselves, and the men choose to let 'em do it, I don't see as any one has a right to complain; but if women expect to help men, why, I should say they'd be more bother than they was wuth."

"Why?"

"I take it it's like this. Sometimes you come out into my kitchen, Miss Lesley, to make a batch of cake. Now I don't grudge your coming, it's real pleasant to have you 'round; but what with beating up the eggs for you, and having to watch the oven to see that your cake don't burn, and washing up for you afterwards,—and you do make a pile of dishes, Miss Lesley,—why, so far as work is concerned, I'd a good deal ruther make that cake myself. And I guess it's about like that with women making the laws."

Lesley laughed. "But don't you see, Martha," she explained, "that it is the legitimate work of women to make the laws that affect women?"

"Well, I don't know about that, Miss Lesley. You might as well say it is your work to make cake because you eat it; but when a set of people has been trained to do a special thing, the chances are they'll do it better than an untrained set, whether it's cooking, or making laws."

"But Martha," Lesley pursued, with a gleam

of mischief in her eyes, "do you like to be classed with minors, idiots, criminals, and the insane?"

"Miss Lesley, it's nonsense to talk that way. We're mostly classed according to our deserts. If those suffragists expect to be classed with idiots, I guess there's a good reason why."

V

LESLEY'S FREEDOM

LESLEY had been asked to go to New York to stay for a fortnight with Florence Hallett, Nathan Hart's sister. Mrs. Freeman was unselfishly eager to have her niece go, and after some demurring, and in the face of Mrs. Ward's marked disapproval, Lesley accepted the invitation.

Florence Hart was one of her oldest friends. They had quarreled as children, and had their differences settled by Nathan, and they had been room-mates the first two years in college.

"I wonder if I am wrong to go," Lesley said, the evening before her contemplated departure, as Martha was helping her with her packing. "Mrs. Ward thinks I ought n't to leave my aunt."

"Well, Miss Lesley, your aunt got on for four years without you. I guess she can stand a fortnight."

"You don't think I am of much account, do you, Martha?" the girl said with a smile.

"I am thinking it would be a pity to waste that black evening gown on Renton. We ain't used to such style here. Bare necks are cold comfort in zero weather."

"Do you know, much as I want to go, I dread

it now the time is so nearly here? I always think of all the dreadful things that may happen."

"Well, Miss Lesley, I know it is hard to leave her, but think how soon you'll be back, and think what a lot you'll have to tell her. It will be as good as a play, especially if you meet Mr. Henry Bowen Northbrook and convert him to woman's suffrage."

"I have n't the least expectation of meeting Mr. Northbrook, and I am sure I don't want to, — the very idea of him makes me cross."

"There's the doorbell," said Martha.

"Oh, bother! Martha, I can't see anybody, not *anybody*, remember. I mean it! nobody, unless it is Miss Amy."

Presently Martha appeared at the door with a face of grim determination.

"It is Mr. Hart. I told him you'd be right down. I'll finish your packing."

"What did I tell you to say, Martha?"

"Miss Lesley, you could n't expect me to give such a message to Mrs. Hallett's brother."

As Nathan had been at the house only two nights before, and told Lesley he should see her off on the train, she had some reason for thinking this call superfluous.

"Well, tell him I'll come presently," she said in a resigned voice, and she was perverse enough not to go down for a quarter of an hour.

Nathan rose when he saw Lesley at the parlor door and went forward to meet her. He was very

tall and carried himself as if he had never become used to his height. As Lesley glanced at his awkward figure and plain face, with the kindly, patient eyes, her heart smote her.

"I am very glad to see you, it was so good of you to come around again," she said. "I'm sorry to have kept you waiting."

"You only kept me waiting a few moments," he returned, in his slow, drawling way. "I ought not to have come when you were so busy," he added, with the characteristic meekness that always irritated her. "But I have been reading your article since I saw you, and I wanted to tell you how very much I like it. You have converted me to woman's suffrage."

"How nice of you to be converted," Lesley said, wishing in her heart of hearts that she might have made a more striking convert.

Mr. Hart proceeded to discuss the suffrage question. He never by any chance made an original remark, no matter what the subject was; but he was a good listener, and appreciated Lesley's observations, original and otherwise, in an indiscriminate way that was trying to her. He had sufficient reliability and faithfulness for three ordinary men, and was literally truthful and exasperatingly accurate, while wholly lacking in imagination. In short, he would have been thoroughly commonplace, save that reliability and faithfulness are not too common.

Nathan Hart had been in love with Lesley ever

since she was a schoolgirl, and she feared that with him a habit once formed, whether that of working conscientiously, or loving persistently, was something only to be terminated by death. She occasionally had a nervous dread lest in the years' to come he might force her to marry him through sheer will. She felt a real affection for him, but there were times when he bored her so that she could only get through the evening by suggesting cribbage or halma. His lack of imagination made him oblivious to the fact that he bored her. He merely credited her with an unusual fondness for games. She liked to succeed in whatever she undertook, and if she had to play a game, it was positively necessary to her happiness that she should beat.

"I was quite appalled when I found Aunt Irene had told you I wrote that article," Lesley confessed. "She was very anxious to keep it a secret, but so far as I can find out, she has told everybody in town."

"Only three people," said a mildly reproachful voice from the sofa, "and they all promised not to tell."

"I should think you would be proud to have every one know you wrote the essay, it is so clever," said Nathan.

"Oh, I'm proud enough. It was only for Aunt Irene's sake I was keeping it secret. She thinks I'm a firebrand."

A few minutes later Mrs. Freeman complained of

pain, and Nathan went over to the sofa and adjusted her cushions in a way that went straight to the invalid's heart. The pain suddenly grew worse.

"Had n't I better go for the doctor?" Nathan asked with a grave face.

"Oh, no," said Lesley. "She will be better directly. She often has this pain. It is only one of her usual heart attacks."

Sending for the doctor seemed to imply a dreary vista of illness.

A few minutes later Nathan quietly took everything into his own hands. He called Martha, and then he carried Mrs. Freeman upstairs, where Lesley, in an agony of alarm, sat holding her aunt's hand. She had a shuddering sense of self-contempt when she remembered that her first feeling had been disappointment that her visit must be postponed. She alternately longed for and dreaded Dr. Washburn's arrival. At last he came.

"I think it is n't going to be anything serious this time," was his verdict, after an examination of his patient, and then he beckoned to Lesley to follow him into the entry. "She must stay in bed for a few days," he said, "and I will telegraph for a trained nurse."

"A trained nurse!" Lesley cried blankly. "Do you mean to say she is going to be ill enough to need a trained nurse?"

"They know how to make their patients so comfortable, and it is always best to take every precaution," he answered evasively.

"I should feel much easier if you had some one here with you for the night," he said, hesitating. "If she were worse, not that I expect it, either you or Martha would have to come for me; I wish you had a telephone. Is there no friend I can get to come here for the night?"

"Oh, if Amy Madison could only come," said Lesley.

"That is the very thing."

Amy and her father were putting out the lights when the doctor arrived. Judge Madison liked to sit up until all hours of the night, according to his wife, while she preferred to go to bed early. Amy generally sat up with her father. She liked the quiet when all her brothers and sisters were in bed, and there was usually mending to be done, or some book to read that she had not time for during the day. Sometimes her father read aloud to her, but oftener he preferred to read to himself, and smoke the cigar his wife never permitted in her presence, but that his more indulgent daughter allowed. It was a pleasure to Amy merely to sit in the same room with her father, even if he never spoke a word to her.

"Didn't I hear the doorbell?" asked the judge. "What does anybody mean by coming here at this time of night? Confound the idiot!"

"Hush, father, he'll hear you."

"I hope he will. Anybody ought to be horse-whipped who comes to a house on any errand after ten o'clock."

"I beg your pardon," said the doctor, a sudden attack of shyness seizing him, as Amy opened the door. "I'm sorry to disturb you, but — it's an urgent case. Mrs. Freeman is very ill, and Miss Lesley hoped you could come there for the night."

"Good-evening, doctor," said the judge blandly. With all her experience his daughter was never prepared for these rapid transitions of manner. "Hope you are all well at your house."

"Lesley's aunt is very ill," Amy explained hurriedly; "Dr. Washburn has come for me to go there for the night."

"You shall do nothing of the kind. You are not a trained nurse that you should run about from house to house whenever there is a case of illness. I forbid it — we need you here — I" —

"I am going, father," said Amy firmly, as she went upstairs to pack her bag. "You can tell mother. I shall probably come home soon after breakfast."

It was moonlight as Amy and Dr. Washburn walked down the deserted street. The world seemed unreal in the stillness, a great white ghost of a world, with its white houses, and banks of white snow piled high along the roadside, and the white fleecy clouds that every now and then obscured the moon.

"Take my arm," said the doctor; "it is slippery here."

"I have my bag in one hand, and I am holding up my gown with the other."

"Give me your bag. I didn't notice you had a bag. I have the worst manners, but it is only from absent-mindedness."

A feeling of utter content seized Amy as the doctor possessed himself of her disengaged hand and slipped her arm through his. As they went together down the long white vista, she felt as if she could walk on forever in this dream world, where his presence was so great a pleasure as for the moment to dull her anxiety about Lesley's aunt.

Amy was perfectly aware that the doctor never thought of her from one end of the year to the other, and she felt equally sure that his mind was full of Lesley. Amy had too much common sense to fancy herself in love with him; nevertheless she knew that if she were the sort of girl with whom men fell in love, and he had cared for her, she could have cared for him. Lesley's lack of susceptibility was incomprehensible to her more impressionable friend.

"I am afraid I am walking too fast for you," the doctor said, slackening his pace.

"No," said Amy, "I can walk as fast as you can." They were in sight of Mrs. Freeman's house now, and she had a little pang when she felt how soon the dream walk would be over.

"How beautiful it is," she said in an almost inaudible voice. "I feel as if I could never forget those tall firs with their coating of snow, outlined against the sky, and that white, white winter moon,

and the drifts of snow everywhere. It is so cold; and yet inside, where the light is, it is colder still. I dread to go in. I dread seeing Lesley. Do you think Mrs. Freeman will get over this attack?"

"I hope so, for the sake of that poor girl. For her own sake, I hope she will not, for it will only mean a life of curtailed strength and much physical suffering."

Amy was silent. Suddenly there came over her, with a kind of horror, the thought of the absolute inevitableness of death. They were in front of Mrs. Freeman's house now.

Amy met Lesley without even a kiss. She knew instinctively that at the least sign of sympathy her friend would break down.

Lesley's face was white and strained. She tried to speak and failed.

"I'm sorry your aunt is ill," Amy said, in a matter-of-fact voice. "I hope she'll be all right to-morrow, and that you'll only have to put off your visit a few days. I'll go and sit with her and Martha a little while, and you can lie down."

Lesley shook her head. "I shall be myself in a minute," she said brokenly. "When there is the least thing the matter with Aunt Irene, I always have to go through in imagination with— with everything. By to-morrow, when she is better, I shall see what a fool I was."

"Yes, dear."

But to-morrow she was not better, and at the end of a week the life that for so many years had

hung on a slender thread seemed fast ebbing away. Mrs. Freeman had been an invalid for so long, that at first her niece refused to recognize the seriousness of her condition. It could not be that such a terrible grief as her aunt's death was coming to her. When Lesley had finished her college course and had reluctantly come back to settle down in a country village, with a sense of rebellion in her heart, not against her aunt, but against fate, she had never once doubted that her reward for this sacrifice would be the prolonged life of her aunt. Some time, in that delightful some time, which takes the place of fairy-land when we have ceased to be children, they would go to Europe together, taking everything by easy stages, and settle down in some quiet Italian town, full of poetry and romance and winter flowers and sunshine, some time — and now —

“Of course there is a chance,” said the doctor, “but I ought not to conceal the fact from you that your aunt is critically ill.”

The light went out of Lesley's face, and for the moment she seemed turned to stone. Then she said, with quick decision, “She is going to get well. I know it. I feel it.”

She went softly into her aunt's room. The trained nurse was sitting at the foot of the bed, and there was such a look of compassion in her eyes when they met the girl's that Lesley quickly turned her head away. Mrs. Freeman smiled at her niece. She was too tired to speak. Lesley

slipped quietly out of the door, and flinging herself down on the bed in her own room burst into a passion of tears.

"I cannot bear it," she said to herself over and over again. "I cannot bear it."

After Lesley had grown quieter, she looked in again at her aunt's door. Mrs. Freeman was sleeping.

"Call me when she wakes up," Lesley said to the nurse; and to Martha she said, "I'm very tired. I am going to lie down; I can't see any one but Amy."

Lesley's head was throbbing and her eyes were burning. She slipped off her dress and put on her red wrapper. As she did so she had a keen, unexpected pang. The wrapper reminded her of one of the many differences of opinion between herself and her aunt. Mrs. Freeman had thought it too bright and had wanted her to get a Quaker gray, and have merely the collar and cuffs of red.

"Dear," Lesley murmured, "if you will only live I will do what you want for the rest of your life. I will never, never leave you. How could I have been thinking of going to New York for a fortnight — to lose two weeks, two whole weeks! I did not know then what happiness meant. Oh, why are we made to care so much, when it is too late?"

There was a knock at the door. "Miss Amy is downstairs," said Martha.

Lesley rose hastily and smoothed her disheveled

hair. With a sudden impulse she put her head down on the faithful servant's shoulder.

"Martha," she said, "you'll be good to me, you'll never leave me, if — if" —

Martha was crying too. "It's just as if she was my own mother," she said. "No one could be kinder to me. Of course, Miss Lesley, I'll always stay by you."

A moment later Amy came upstairs. She folded Lesley in a long, close embrace. Neither spoke at first. Then Lesley said, "I am breaking my heart over all the things I have done I ought not to have done, always, ever since I was a little girl."

"You made her very happy."

"That is the worst of it," Lesley sobbed. "She was so gentle and unexacting. Any one else would have thought me a hateful little imp."

"Lesley!"

"Yes, I was, and I am not much better now. Oh, Amy! Do you remember that day last autumn when she wanted to hear my paper again, — the dear thing, when she had heard it three times, — and I wanted you all to myself, and slipped out of the room before she could say anything more? When we are happy why can't we know what agony we can suffer, when" —

"You are tired out," said Amy, "and it makes you morbid. I never knew any one who had less to regret than you. You could not make yourself over any more than she could, but she loved you

a great deal more than if you had been only an echo of herself."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"If she only gets well I will be more of a comfort than I have ever been. It kills me to think I was planning to leave her for a whole fortnight. Of course I am a fool. I know it. I ought to have more self-control. I always supposed I was the sort of person to be a prop to other people and not break down in this senseless way."

"Dear," said the other gently, "you have never broken down when there was anything you could do."

It was midnight, and Lesley sat motionless in the room where her aunt lay dying. The expression of compassion had left the face of the trained nurse, and she had the air of one who had witnessed many such scenes, and was waiting patiently for the inevitable end. Lesley's eyes were fixed absently on the shaded night-lamp. She could not bear to look at her aunt. Now that there was absolutely no hope, now that length of life would mean prolongation of suffering, she had a kind of resignation. She felt quiet and cold. The time for shedding tears had passed. Once, a long time ago, she, Lesley Chilton, had felt pain, remorse, and grief; now she felt nothing. She knew that the thought of death, which had always been so terrible to her, would be welcome to her

aunt, every day of whose gentle, unselfish life had been a preparation for it. Once she looked up and caught the reflection of her own face in the mirror. How young she looked! How full of life! The long, long years would go on for her, thirty, forty, perhaps fifty or sixty years, the long, long years, shorn of the best that life can give. It is better to be tied by love than to be free without it, her aunt had once said. It was true. When Lesley had longed for freedom she had never wanted to gain it at such a price. Now she was to be free — free to lead her own life, free to do absolutely as she pleased; and she, who had so eagerly desired the best gifts of the world, would gladly fling them all away, if she could only take two short weeks out of her life, and have her aunt as she had been.

“Mrs. Freeman can hardly live through the night,” the doctor said, when he came in a little before one o’clock. “I am going to stay here. You had better go and lie down, Miss Chilton; your aunt is n’t conscious, she does n’t know you are here. I will call you if there is any change.”

Lesley shook her head. “It is the last thing I can do for her,” she said softly, “and how can we tell that she may not understand?”

VI

FRIENDS IN NEED

It was a fortnight since the funeral of Lesley's aunt, a terrible fortnight to remember, full of dreary days and restless nights. The whole community mourned with Lesley, for every one loved Mrs. Freeman, and many a social gathering was put off, as if she were near of kin to them all. But, after a time, the world went its way, and people ceased talking in subdued tones of Lesley's great loss, and began to plan out her future; for when a girl is under twenty-five, her friends who have reached a mature age are apt to consider that they are better able to judge of what will make her happy than she is herself.

"Of course she can't live alone," the members of the Suffrage Club decided at one of their weekly meetings.

"Mother is most eager to have her live with us," said Miss Cynthia Ward. "I was so touched. Mother, as a rule, takes very little interest in the girls of to-day. She says they have atrocious manners, and talk such slang; so it seemed to me really remarkable when mother said; 'I am sorry for that poor girl, she needs a guiding hand. She is so bright and cheerful that I should like to have her around the house.'"

"The judge and I are eager to have her live with us," Mrs. Madison hastened to remark. "She and Amy are such friends I am sure she would be happier at our house than anywhere else, but it seems too soon to speak to her of her future plans."

"As if any girl in her senses would go to live with that old cat!" Mrs. Madison said to her husband that evening. "It is quite enough for Mrs. Ward to have blighted her daughters' lives without spoiling Lesley's!"

"I should think any girl who would live at the Madisons' was a born idiot!" Cynthia Ward said to her sister Emma, as they were walking home from the Suffrage Club. "Fancy being cooped up with all those children and having to share Amy's room!"

Mrs. Madison had not meant to speak to Lesley of her future plans quite so soon, but if Mrs. Ward was going to do it she must forestall her. It was not easy, however, to get ahead of Mrs. Ward, who had the advantage of living opposite Lesley. Late that very afternoon she sent her daughters over to call on her young neighbor, for she wanted her proposition to come before Mrs. Madison's.

"The Miss Wards are downstairs, Miss Lesley, and they are most anxious to see you," said Martha.

Lesley was sitting at her writing-desk, answering one of her many notes of condolence.

"Oh, bother!" she exclaimed. "I can't go down, Martha. I don't feel like seeing any one to-day. Tell them I am very sorry, but that I am engaged."

Martha paused in the doorway with disapproval on her face.

"You've seen Miss Amy, and the judge, and Dr. Washburn to-day. I don't see why being in trouble should give us the right to pick and choose our company. It's the fourth time Miss Cynthia has been here; once you was out, but twice you could have seen her just as well as not, and Miss Emma has been here once before. Your dear aunt, God bless her, was always ready to see all the folks that came — when she was well enough. Mrs. Ward sent a beautiful cross made of white roses, to the funeral, you remember, and they cost a lot at this season. No friends could be kinder than the Wards."

"You are right, you dear old thing," said Lesley, preparing to go down.

As Lesley came into the room Miss Ward was struck anew with her beauty. Her black gown seemed only to accentuate her young charm, the brightness of her color and the softness of her eyes.

"Dear Miss Ward," said Lesley, "how good it was of you to come. I am so glad to see you."

And she was not insincere. The moment she saw Cynthia Ward's animated face subdued to the occasion, and felt the warm clasp of her hand, all

her impatience died away. Lesley then turned to greet the younger sister. Miss Emma Ward was one of those self-sacrificing, humble-minded persons who are so unattractive that there is nothing for their acquaintances to do but dwell on their virtues. She was not especially plain, but she had done all in her power to accentuate her weak points. Her sandy hair was screwed into the most uncompromising of knots, and her near-sighted eyes were incased in the severest of spectacles. She had fallen a victim to an invalid mother, who, having unconsciously prevented her from leading any independent life, was often bored by the result.

Emma sank into a corner of the sofa and Cynthia began to talk at once.

"You are looking so well, Lesley," she said. "You don't show the strain at all. Mother, Emma, and I have watched you every day when you have gone out, but we could n't tell just how you were looking, on account of the veil."

They talked of generalities for a time, and even laughed over Miss Ward's report of the afternoon meeting of the Suffrage Club; at last she said abruptly, "How you must miss your dear aunt!"

"I do," said Lesley simply.

"It must be so hard not to have her thoughtful care."

"The not having some one to take care of is what I miss even more."

"Do you? it is so sweet and womanly of you

to feel like that, and it makes what I have to say easier."

She paused, and then began a little nervously. "We have all felt as sorry for you as if you were our own sister."

"That is very good of you. No one could have kinder friends than I have in you all."

"I am so glad you feel so. It is delightful to know that the attraction is mutual, for it makes what I have to propose perfectly natural. My mother, — it is she who has the ideas of the family, although, to tell the truth, Emma and I had talked the same thing over together first, but we wanted the proposition to come from her, — mother is most anxious to have you live with us."

If a bombshell had suddenly exploded in that peaceful room, Lesley could hardly have been more uncomfortably surprised. She was silent a moment, trying to frame an answer which should be absolutely definite yet thoroughly polite.

"Your mother is very kind," she began.

"Oh, no, it is quite as much for our advantage as for yours."

"It is good of you all to want me, but I have n't made my plans yet."

"That is just it. Now you won't have to make any plans. You will just come across the street to live with us. You must n't feel you are under any obligation to us, it will be everything for mother to see a fresh young face, and you read aloud well, and you and mother have always been

such friends. 'I really love the girl!' she said, and that is a great deal from mother, is n't it, Emma?"

"A great deal," said Emma, rousing to the occasion. "Mother does not like every one."

"You need n't feel uneasy about your house," Miss Ward said, "for my brother wants to come to town for the summer with his family, and he would like to hire your house; so that difficulty is settled."

"You are very kind, but I had been planning to live on in the house."

"Alone?"

"Yes, with Martha."

"But Lesley, that is impossible. You are too young, you are too great a favorite. You must have a chaperone. Mother saw that at once. She said, 'Of course Lesley must have a chaperone! and as there seems to be no one who can live with her, it will be better for her to come to live with us.'"

Lesley shook her head. "You are all very good and I shall never forget your kindness, but I can't come to you. It would n't seem natural to me, if I stay here, to be anywhere but in Aunt Irene's house. Please thank your mother, and tell her I am very much touched, but that it is utterly impossible."

The next morning Mrs. Madison came to make her proposal.

"Do you know," Lesley confided to her, "those dear, kind Wards want me to live with them, and

they can't understand how any one in her sane mind can prefer to live alone."

"Of course it would be absurd for you to live with them," Mrs. Madison agreed, "but I do think it would be better for you to live with some one, Lesley. You are young, and you look even younger than you are, and you have a great many men friends. Of course you are better able to look out for yourself than many older women, but people will talk and criticise. While we live in the world we must conform to its customs."

"I did n't think you would feel so," Lesley said reproachfully; "I thought what all of us suffragists wanted was to improve the customs of the world. Surely you have said over and over again, that a woman should do anything she is fitted for."

"Anything she is fitted for, that is exactly it. Now you are fitted to vote, and fitted to manage your property, but no handsome girl under twenty-five is fitted to live alone in a gossiping New England town. If you were obliged to do it, that would be another matter; people would be sorry for you, and that would put them in a charitable frame of mind. Lesley dear, the judge and I were talking it over last evening. He is very anxious to have you come to live with us, and so are Amy and I, while the children are wild with delight at the bare idea."

Lesley had no doubt that they were. If it had not been for the omnipresent children, who loved her so fondly, she might have consented. The

thought of the children gave her courage to be firm.

"I know I must seem selfish and ungrateful to all of you dear people," she said, "but I want to be free, absolutely free. I want leisure to go on with my music, and to study; and by and by I want to travel. Don't you see how much simpler it will be if I live in my own house?"

Mrs. Madison was not easily discouraged, and she argued the matter for half an hour. When she was at last convinced that Lesley would not yield, she said: "At least then, my dear, if you won't come to us, you must get some older person to live with you."

"I could n't have an older person. It would keep reminding me of dear Aunt Irene. It is hard enough to lose the friend one has loved best, but it would be simply intolerable if I had to have a figure head to sit at my table, and criticise all I did. I am not anxious to live alone. If you would let Amy live with me I should be very grateful."

"Amy! We cannot spare her. Of course I don't mean that we can't spare her occasionally for a few weeks, but our family would go to pieces without Amy, and what you need is an older person. The judge, who, except that he does n't believe in woman's suffrage, is the wisest man I know, — the judge said: 'Of course, she can't live alone!'"

"You all talk as if I were going to live absolutely alone. Now I consider Martha a most thoroughly satisfactory dragon."

"Martha can't spend the evening with you when your men friends drop in, and she can't preside at your table."

Lesley's usually sweet temper was beginning to be ruffled.

"I had meant to spend the summer here," she said; "but if all my friends are going to sit in judgment on every little thing I do, I shall let my house to Miss Ward's brother, and take Martha off with me to the wilds."

"Martha, do you think I'm too young to live alone?" she asked her maid that evening. "Don't you think you and I can get along without a chaperone?"

"Of course we can, Miss Lesley. We don't want any chaperones fooling round. They are more trouble and expense than they are wuth. It would be different if you could hire 'em by the day, same as you can an accommodater, but it costs a lot to feed 'em, and they can't sit up all night, so there's extra sheets to wash and a room to take care of. And what does it amount to? If a girl has got any sense, a chaperone ain't to keep her from doing the things she had n't ought to, but to prevent folks from talking about the things she has n't done. You don't want to fling away your money on frills of that kind. Chaperones!"

VII

ALTRUISM

Now that every one was obliged to recognize the depressing fact that Lesley was determined to go away to spend the summer, her kind friends, as usual, had much excellent advice to give her. Lesley had been lured to Mrs. Madison's house one afternoon in May, by the promise of an unusually interesting debate on the success or failure of woman's suffrage in Colorado, for the Suffrage Club contained so many anti-suffragists that it had degenerated into a discussion club. Mrs. Madison had ably proved the overwhelming benefit that woman's suffrage had been to Colorado, and Miss Cynthia Ward had demonstrated its failure in an equally masterly manner.

"Well," said Mrs. Madison, who always kept her temper under the most trying circumstances, "I suppose the meeting may as well adjourn. I don't see that we can settle the question unless we take a trip to Colorado, and even then, Cynthia, I suppose if you and I went together we should each come back unshaken in our views. By the way, Lesley, you might go to Colorado for the summer, as you want an entire change."

"I have heard of just the house for you, Lesley," said Mrs. Fairbanks. "As I understand it, you

want to be in a quiet place, free from interruptions, where you can go on with your music and studies?"

Put in this bald way, in Mrs. Fairbanks's harsh voice, Lesley felt tempted to renounce her plans.

"I am afraid I want a combination that does not exist," she said with a smile: "a house perfectly isolated, and yet with agreeable neighbors; a climate warm enough to wear gingham dresses, yet never hot; the sea in front of me, and a mountain and lake at the back of the house, and, above all things, an old-fashioned garden full of berries and hollyhocks. The house must be so small Martha can do all the work, and yet the rooms must be large and airy, and I must have a Steinway piano."

"I know of just the place," Mrs. Fairbanks proceeded. "My sister wants to let her charming, old-fashioned house in Cambridge. She has a Steinway piano, and you would not be troubled with neighbors, as most people go away in summer. You can get the salt breezes whenever you cross Harvard Bridge, and you can have an excellent chance to go on with your studies, for you could attend the summer school."

"Isn't it rather hot in Cambridge?" Lesley asked.

"Oh, no! Only pleasantly warm — you could wear your gingham dresses. My sister usually spends the summer there, but this year she wants to go to Europe. There is a delightful garden full of currants and raspberries."

"Lesley would never want to be in Cambridge all summer," said Miss Clark, a middle-aged lady. "Why don't you go to Europe with me? There is nothing like change of scene to divert the mind after grief. It is not that we forget the dear one, but that constant variety dulls the pain."

"My friends the Halletts have asked me to go to Europe with them, but I don't feel like it this year. I want a quiet place"—

"I am sure West Swanzey, New Hampshire, would suit you," broke in Miss Cynthia Ward. "It is a perfectly suitable place for a girl who is living alone. Mother says so. Her brother spends his summers there; but this year he wants to let his house, as it is a little too quiet for his young daughters. The air is delicious, there are pleasant drives, and plenty of berries. The nearest neighbor is half a mile off, and there is a view of Monadnoc. Mother wished me to tell you she is sure you had better go there."

These were by no means the only suggestions that Lesley received. She was fairly bewildered by the multiplicity of vacant houses, at the seashore or in the mountains, where the rent was moderate and the advantages great; but she finally decided to take the Halletts' house at Mount Desert, where she would have both sea and mountains, a few congenial neighbors, and a piano.

Mrs. Madison and the judge were unselfish enough to say that Amy might go to Mount Desert with Lesley for the whole summer, for they felt it

was the time of all others in Lesley's life when she needed their daughter.

Amy had come to spend the night with Lesley, to talk over their plans for the journey which was to take place in a few days. Lesley had asked Martha to start a fire in the spare room, and the girls were sitting before the cheerful blaze. Martha did not approve of the fire, and unfortunately she was one of those persons whose disapproval is disturbing enough to cloud one's entire day.

"Your aunt never used to have a fire in her bedroom, delicate as she was, after the first of June," Martha protested.

"If you don't want to bring up the wood, I'll get it myself," said Lesley, who happened to be in an especially determined mood.

"I did n't say I minded bringing up the wood, I was merely remarking that your aunt never had a fire in her bedroom after the first of June, no matter what the weather was."

"But Martha, I want the fire for Miss Amy, because she is used to a warm room, and then we can spend the evening upstairs, and if callers come I shan't have to see them. You know you are very fond of Miss Amy."

"I'm thinking, Miss Lesley, that Miss Amy would be comfortable in a room without a fire, in June. Miss Amy is one who never gives unnecessary trouble. She's the loveliest person on God's earth, Miss Amy is. It is a wonder she ain't ever got married, but that's all the sense men

have. She's the kind that would let a man walk right over her, and as for you, Miss Lesley, you always makes 'em stand round. It's queer they like you so well, but I suppose it's your conversation they enjoy."

"And Martha, you will make a fire, won't you?" pleaded Lesley.

And now, the fire being an accomplished fact, Lesley was basking in its blaze with the sensations of a soldier after a hard-won victory.

"Amy, I don't know what I should do without you," she said, clasping her friend's hand. "There is no one in the world who can be to me what you are."

"But you have so many friends."

"Yes, I am blessed with them, but you are like a friend and sister. I wish you could live with me all the time, but I can see that you can't. You must be in Boston with me, though, next winter, and when I go to Europe, — and I mean to go some day, when I have got over this horrible depression, — I shall take you with me."

"I am afraid I shall never have money enough to go to Europe."

"I shall invite you, of course. I am rich, rich enough to have a fire in the spare room in June, and what is money good for except to let us be selfish in our own way? It is only selfishness. I want you more than anything in the world."

Amy was not demonstrative, and although she felt Lesley's affection to the heart's core, she said

nothing, but merely gave her friend's hand a little pressure.

"You will stay with me as much of my life as you can, won't you dear?" Lesley asked.

"Of course I will, if you want me."

"Why do you look so skeptical?"

"I was only thinking how short a time it will probably be before you are married."

"I am afraid I shall never see a man I could be enough in love with to marry."

"I don't see why you can't care for" —

Lesley put up a forbidding hand. "Please don't mention any names. I have never seen such a man, and very likely I never shall, so if you promise to live with me, you will have a long job of it, for I intend to live to be eighty. By the way, who knows but you may be married? That is a horrible possibility I never thought of."

"Of course you have n't, no one thinks of it in connection with me. I am the kind of girl in whom men never take the faintest interest."

"If I were a man would n't I make frantic love to you until I thawed you out and swept you off your feet," Lesley cried. "Well, there is a great deal in life without marriage, — work, glory, friends, fortune, and independence. When I think of all I shall have to give up if I ever fall in love, I hope I shan't for years and years. I want to have a free hand until I am at least thirty-five. I tell you what I should like, — an ideal friendship. I should like to know an extremely interesting man

who was n't in love with me, but thought me the most brilliant and fascinating woman in the world; some one with whom I could have stimulating companionship, but would n't see often enough to get bored with."

And for the rest of the evening Amy could not get Lesley to talk anything but the wildest nonsense.

VIII

AN UNDISCOURAGED LOVER

"I CANNOT get used to having so much money," Lesley said to Nathan Hart. He and Judge Madison were her executors, and Nathan had come this afternoon to consult her on a business matter.

"I never supposed managing one's property would be so interesting, and so comparatively simple," she added presently. "If I had only found out that I had a taste for business sooner, I might have spared Aunt Irene so many worries. And oh, how I wish I had known she had so much money! I should have insisted on her making herself comfortable."

"It was her greatest pleasure to save for you. She has said to me so many times, 'Lesley will be rich. I want her to be thoroughly independent, so that she can carry out all her plans. I want her to be absolutely free.'"

"Dear Aunt Irene! And she disapproved so of my ideas!" Lesley furtively pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

"You can't imagine how hard it is to choose when you are absolutely free," she said. "I used to be so restless, and now that I can do exactly as I please I feel like a boat without a rudder. I am sure I am wise in going to Mount Desert for the

summer. Every one here is too kind; they don't let me have a minute to myself."

"I suppose you are wise, but I—we shall all miss you terribly."

Lesley knew only too well what was coming.

"Of course you know," Nathan began, in his slow, hesitating way, "what I've told you at intervals, ever since you were grown up. You know there is no one, there never has been any one I've cared for but you, and there never will be."

"I am sorry," Lesley said in a low voice that was so sympathetic it only made it harder for her lover. "I am sorry, because, as I have told you before, it can never come to anything."

"Yes, I know you have told me that, but so long as you don't care for any one else you can't expect me to give up hope. I love you so much, I should be only too glad to help you in all your plans. You could be just as free as you are now, only you'd have me to take care of you."

"Sometimes I used to be afraid I had n't any heart," Lesley confided to him. "I mean the kind of heart other women have; I am always more or less in love with every man who is in love with me, enough in love to think about him a great deal more than is wise, and to miss him frightfully when he goes out of my life, but that is all. I have never seen any man that I have missed so much I have wanted to call him back. Well, last winter when Aunt Irene was ill, I knew I had a heart. I suffered so much, and I have kept on missing her so that I

knew it was n't that I could n't care, that some time I might care so much — so much — do you see what I mean?"

She paused, and looked up at him appealingly. "You are very kind and I am so lonely," she went on rapidly, "and Aunt Irene liked you and wanted it to be; sometimes I have tried to think — on days when I was tired, I have thought how restful it would be to have some one take care of me who was too unselfish to demand anything for himself, but something tells me it would be wrong, wrong to you and to myself to try to shirk life like that. I know I often seem frivolous, and heartless, and selfish; sometimes I am. I know I seem to live on the surface. It is only because I don't dare to go down into the depths. I am telling you all this because no man has ever loved me with such constancy as you have, and I feel that you deserve the truth. I am going away, and I shall not see you for a long time. I want you to know how much I shall always value your friendship, but that I am as sure I can never love you, in the way you mean, as if I were already in love with some one else."

"I don't see how you can be so sure of that."

She had been looking at him with eyes full of pity, forgetting for the moment his unattractive personality, and thinking only of his kindness, but those simple words made her feel anew the incompatibility between them. The lack of imagination that made him unable to grasp her meaning was one of the unremovable barriers that separated them.

"I am sure," she said.

And then, as she looked at his honest, appealing eyes the pity of it struck her. She had it in her power to be sheltered from every rough gale. His was the manly, protecting, unselfish love that would never change, but at the mere thought she had a sickening feeling of being unable to breathe. The very steadiness of his affection would stifle her. Whatever life might hold, and she had a half-terrifying vision of what that might be, she could not shirk the consequences of her temperament.

Nathan rose, and they stood looking at each other for a moment in silence.

"Good-by," he said quietly. He was outwardly composed; it was Lesley who lost her self-control.

"Don't feel badly," he said, "you can't help it. You've never once been anything but honest with me. And I oughtn't to have spoken to-day. It was only—I wanted you to know how I should feel always, and if you need me any time in any way I am always ready."

IX

A BROKEN REED

LESLEY had always wanted to spend a summer in a cottage by the sea, and now she was to have her wish. She was in a cynical mood as she and Martha and Miss Cynthia Ward started for Mount Desert. A summer cottage she was to have, but how could she enjoy it? How could she enjoy anything without her dear aunt? And to add the finishing touch to her sense of the irony of fate, Amy was obliged to postpone her visit for a fortnight, and stay at home to help nurse her sister Caroline through an attack of measles. Lesley's other intimate friends could none of them come to her at such short notice, and she could not put off her own departure, as the Wards' brother and his family were coming at once to take her house. And thus it happened that instead of having her dearest friend go to Mount Desert with her, it was Miss Cynthia Ward who was her companion, for let a woman be ever so free to choose her own life, fate has a provoking way of opposing obstacles.

Miss Ward enjoyed everything, and she simply revelled in helping Lesley change the Halletts' dismantled cottage into a place full of color and individuality. To be sure Lesley was often forced to have her furniture where Miss Ward wanted it,

but she consoled herself by the reflection that she could make changes as soon as her guest had gone. Miss Ward said of Lesley that it was pleasant to work with her because they had but one mind about everything.

Lesley and Miss Ward explored the neighborhood and were enchanted with the fir-fringed coast and blue sea, with its background of mountains. Lesley had thought, in the kindness of her heart, that she should enjoy giving Miss Ward a taste of pleasure, but the hourly presence of this lively soul, who felt it her duty to cheer Lesley, and never leave her a quiet time to brood over her grief, was so irksome to the poor girl that she hailed the day of her friend's departure with a guilty sense of relief.

"I hate to go before Amy comes, you poor child," Miss Cynthia said, as she bade Lesley good-by, "but mother never approves of our changing our plans."

Lesley watched the boat that carried Miss Cynthia away vanish into the fog with that curious foreknowledge that so she should stand many times in the weeks to come, that makes a new experience seem as if it had been lived through many times.

"Well, in a few days Amy will be here," Lesley said when she reached home.

"I shall expect Miss Amy when I see her," said Martha grimly. "Measles is uncertain things when once they get a-holt of a family. I'm sure Theodore will come down with 'em."

"Martha, you are a prophetess," Lesley groaned, when she opened her mail the next day; "that tiresome Theodore Madison has the measles, and so has Paul Washburn, and Amy and her mother are going to take him in, because it will be more amusing for him and Theodore to be ill together. How can I exist for two more long weeks without Amy!"

"It will be a good chance for you to read and play the piano, Miss Lesley. You've always wanted a quiet, uninterrupted time."

"Martha, I should like to strangle you!"

"All right, Miss Lesley; if you do I shan't have any more bother with that old ramshackly stove, and that clothes-line! I thought better of Mr. Hart's sister than to think she would put up with a line instead of a reel. If I'd known I was going to such an outlandish place I'd have given my vote for Cambridge, Mass. It's the second time I've got the spare room fixed up, and Miss Amy is one who is always so considerate. Well, it ain't her fault. Miss Amy is the loveliest person on God's earth."

At last the day was once more fixed for Amy's coming, and Lesley went down to the boat to meet her with a glad heart. She felt acutely disappointed when passenger after passenger came on shore and Amy was not among them. She waited for the mail and found a letter, and opened it carelessly, expecting the usual thing, but to her consternation she read as follows:—

MY DEAR LESLEY, — I hardly know how to tell you what has happened, or whether to tell you now, — written words seem so inadequate. If I had you close by me, dear, I think I could make you understand; and yet it might be that from shyness on my side, or from reserve on yours, I could say nothing, and so perhaps it is best to write the wonderful news. Lesley, I have promised to marry Dr. Washburn. I can see you start, I fancy I can read your mind. She, engaged! Amy Madison! plain, shy, quiet, a girl whom men notice so little they almost forget to bow to her when they pass her in the street! And yet it is true! How shall I tell you about it, when it is so new and incredible that I cannot understand it as yet myself? I grew to know him better at the time of your aunt's illness. I was so sure he cared for you, and that he would like to talk to me about you, because I was your friend, that I was not shy with him, and when Caroline was ill, and he came to see her, he would often tell me of his worries, and talk to me freely about his life. I thought it was because I was sympathetic; it never crossed my mind that it could be anything more; and I was happy, even with that. I thought, "I would rather be myself, plain, quiet, and cursed with a temperament that makes life a tragedy and have his friendship, than to be any other;" and I was glad to have lived, starved and stunted, for I had had a glimpse of what life might hold. When Paul was with us Dr. Washburn came every

day to see him. He saw that Paul had taken an extraordinary fancy to me, and at first I think he began to wonder how it would seem to have some one always about who would love Paul and be good to him, and then when he knew I was so soon to go away for the summer, he said how envious he felt. I supposed he meant because I was to be with you, and for the first time in my life I knew what jealousy was; how it can stab and torture. And I thought, "Lesley is beautiful and brilliant and fascinating, but she does not love him, and he will waste his life trying to make her care. He can never get at the beautiful wonderful soul of her, and she can never reach his real self, for they are on such different planes;" and I thought how cruel it was. The moon was shining through the branches of the oak by the piazza, and there was the scent of roses in the air. Father had gone in and I was just following, for the doctor had got up to go home.

"I suppose it must be good-by for the summer," he said, and then he told me that he was envious. I was afraid he could read my thoughts, they were so overpoweringly strong, but the next minute I knew it was an idle feeling, and I said in a steady voice, that I did not wonder he envied me, for it was the greatest happiness to be with you. And then he told me why he was envious. This is all I can tell you, except that I could not believe him, but now I know it is true. . . . There is nothing in the world so intense as happiness, neither grief, nor despair, nor remorse. Now, when I look back

at my life I feel that I was in a chrysalis. I saw butterflies, and I thought them beautiful. I did not mind being in a chrysalis, because it was my life, God had put me there for some good reason. I never thought it was the happiest life, but it was mine. Now I know what life is. You cannot know it until you come out of the chrysalis, although through sympathy or through imagination you can divine a part.

Dear, I am sure you will forgive me for not coming to you for a few days longer.

With a heart full of love,

Your own AMY.

Lesley, in her black gown, came slowly along the fir-shaded path reading her letter. There was a dejected droop to her usually erect figure that her observant maid was quick to notice. Martha was hanging out clothes behind the house, and Lesley came towards her without once looking up.

"Good land, what 's the matter?" Martha asked, when she saw the expression on her young mistress's face. "Why has n't she come? Have you heard any bad news?"

"I have heard the best of news," Lesley replied with an effort. "It is a little upsetting to my plans, but I am very glad for Amy; she is engaged to Dr. Washburn."

Martha held up both hands in astonishment, regardless of the fact that she had a clothespin in one, and a shirt waist in the other.

"You don't mean it!" she exclaimed. "Well, I never! I always thought by the way he hung round it was you he was after."

That evening Lesley wrote a warmly affectionate and most sympathetic letter to Amy. "I hope Amy won't read between the lines," she thought, "and I don't believe she will. That silent language is chiefly for the unhappy."

Lesley was appalled to find how blank the future looked when she could no longer count on her friend to share it with her. It had never once entered her mind that Amy would marry. She felt utterly alone and forsaken. And her sense of desolation was increased by the fact that Amy was engaged to Dr. Washburn. "So that was all he cared for me," Lesley thought, with a very human sense of pique. "I might have spared myself my worries; I'll never be conscientious again." She was obliged to admit that Dr. Washburn's defection took a certain amount of spice out of her life. Her thoughts, however, soon traveled back to Amy's happiness; she was very, very glad for her.

"If I should ever be in love how hard I should take it!" Lesley reflected presently, "when it upsets me so to have two of my best friends care more for each other than they do for me. Heavens, how insupportable it would be to have one's delightful, untrammelled existence smashed into little pieces!" For, after all, if her life were saddened by the death of her aunt, her present lot seemed enviable compared with the restrictions that were to envelop

her friend. "Martha was right," she thought, "Amy will let him 'walk over her;' it is lucky he has such a light tread; and she will spoil Paul, and slave and drudge for them both, and adore it, that's the way she's made. She is an old-fashioned eighteenth-century woman. Thank heaven I am modern, and if I ever do marry, it will be some one who will let me be as independent as I like."

Martha had gone out on an errand, so Lesley was alone in the house, and she sat down before the piano with a sense of pleasure in her solitude. The fire was burning low, and there was only the soft light from the red-shaded piano lamp; the wind was blowing in fierce gusts, and there was a plash of waves on the rocks. Everything spoke of remoteness from the world. Lesley felt encouraged to express herself without reserve for once. She played a slumber song by Grieg; it did not suit her present mood; then she tried Chopin's Nocturne in G Major, and finally began the first movement of Tschaikowsky's Pathetic Symphony. Parts of it seemed to her as sombre and dreary as her own present, but it was shot through with gleams of sunlight which she hoped might be prophetic of her future.

As Lesley played there came to her the interpretation of life and of love, — not the life of the past nor the love of the past, but that wider life and that broader love that is the dream of the twentieth-century woman. "Not renunciation, not self-sacrifice," she said to herself, "but free-

dom in the best sense, the freedom to assert one's individuality, to follow one's higher nature, to be a lever, and not merely a spoke in a wheel." Her ideal of a happy marriage was not the self-effacing absorption in another that Amy would have, but the union of two strongly individual hearts and minds in the highest form of companionship, where each would supplement the other and yet both would be free.

Lesley was so absorbed in her unaccustomed air-castles that she played on mechanically. She was brought back to the present by a timid ringing of the doorbell. She wondered who could be coming to see her at that hour of the evening, and as Martha had not yet come in she went to the door herself. Outside, she saw a slender girl of fifteen or sixteen and a younger boy. The girl was bare-headed, her light hair was blown wildly about her face, and hung down her back in a thick braid. She had an unmistakable air of refinement, and gray eyes with great beauty of expression. She seemed like some shy, wild creature of the woods. The boy was several years younger, and had dark hair, and black eyes that were peering about restlessly, but finally fixed themselves on Lesley as she stood in the doorway, in her black evening gown, with the light from the hall lantern falling on her face. Both children were speechless for a moment. It seemed the silence of surprise and sudden admiration.

"We came to ask your maid if — if" — stammered the girl.

"We've just moved into the brown house," put in the boy, "and we forgot to order the milk, and Charlotte, our little sister, wants some."

"Of course you can have some milk; come into my parlor and get warm," said Lesley cordially.

The girl produced a pitcher that she had been holding under her golf cape.

"You must think it very funny we forgot about the milk," said the boy, "but we never moved before without a grown-up person."

Lesley felt as if she were befriending the babes in the woods. She longed to ask questions, but knew instinctively that her young guests would be more at their ease if she accepted their visit as the most natural thing in the world.

"Father has gone to Europe," the boy went on, "and Miss Knight was very sick and had to go home."

"The cook is n't good at remembering things," the girl vouchsafed shyly, "and she's got a bad headache."

"I am so glad you had to come yourselves," Lesley said, as she placed two chairs before the smouldering fire. She stooped to put on another stick of wood, and began to fan the flame with the old-fashioned leather bellows, studded with brass nails.

"I can do that for you," said the boy, seizing the bellows, and beginning to use them vigorously. "See, that's going to be a bully fire."

"Hal!" his sister expostulated reproachfully.

"Oh, shut up, Marian! What's the matter with bully? I'm sure it is a bully fire." He gave a rapid glance around the room. It looked very cheerful, with its oriental rugs and the red-shaded piano lamp, while a pitcher of red lilies on the piano and a pile of music gave that corner a cosy, homelike appearance.

"Your house is lots prettier than ours," he said.

"We have n't got out all our things yet, — our house is going to look very pretty," his sister explained.

Lesley left them and presently returned with a tray holding three saucers of canned peaches and some gingerbread.

"I am hungry myself," she said. "I thought it would be nice to have a little feast in front of the fire before I gave you your pitcher of milk. I am so glad you came. I was feeling lonely and blue to-night, for my best friend, who was coming to stay with me, has put it off for the third time."

"You bet I would n't put it off if you asked me to come and stay with you," Hal remarked.

Lesley made no reply. Long experience where children were concerned had taught her it was never safe to be as cordial as she felt.

"That's an awfully pretty lamp shade," Hal said presently.

"I am glad you like it, for I made it myself. I have been alone a great deal since I came down here, so I have had time to do all sorts of odd jobs."

"You won't have to be alone now we have come," Hal informed her. "There are four of us, Marian and I and" —

"Hal, you must n't talk so much," said Marian with dignity. "You were playing when we came," she continued with hesitation. "I — I do so love that Tschaikowsky Symphony. Would you — would you mind playing a little of it now?"

"Oh, shucks!" said the boy.

"Certainly I will play if you want me to," and Lesley seated herself at the piano. She felt the sympathy of her young listener, and as she began the first movement an unexpected feeling of pleasure stole over her. It was good to have companionship. She had not realized how lonely she had been. She was sure that this girl, with her lovely eyes, was going to be a great addition to her pleasure. Yes, she had felt in her sadness that life was never going to be happy any more, but the worshipful glances which these children cast upon her awoke her old sense of pleasure in the society of her kind. "That girl is very responsive," she decided, "and the boy" — by the way, what was the boy doing? He had taken the kindlings out of the wood-basket and piled them up in the fireplace, and was using the bellows with all the vigor of his brief life.

"See here," said Lesley, coming to a sudden stop, "you will set my chimney on fire if you don't look out."

"It's a bully fire," said the boy, his dark eyes

full of irrepressible mischief. "It's a bully, bully" —

"Hal!" his sister cried, rudely awakened from her dream. "How can you be so naughty! We must go home now," she added hastily.

"I should like to keep on playing to you," Lesley said, "but I suppose your little sister will want her milk; I'll get it for you now."

"Some other day you must come again," she told them, as she returned with the filled pitcher, "and I will play to you all you like."

"We'll come to-morrow," said Hal.

"I am going to be very busy to-morrow, but I will invite you some time when I have a free day. Good-night. I am so glad to have neighbors in the brown house. By the way, if I want to send you a note I shan't know how to direct. What is your last name?"

"Northbrook," said the boy.

"Northbrook, — that is strange. It is an unusual name."

"Marian is just Marian Northbrook; father does not like middle names for girls, but I am named for father, — I am Henry Bowen Northbrook, Jr."

X

A NEW ACQUAINTANCE

"MARTHA, I am going to take those children on a sail this afternoon," said Lesley a few days later. She had seen the whole quartette twice in the interval and become warmly attached to all four. "And, Martha, I want to have them come here to dinner first."

"Well, Miss Lesley, of course you can do as you like, but if you begin with 'em so fierce they 'll expect you to keep it up all summer."

"Poor little things," said Lesley; "I don't see how their father had the heart to go off and leave them."

"He did n't know the housekeeper was going to be sick and not able to come down here with them, Miss Lesley."

"Well, I 'm glad Mr. Northbrook is n't to be here this summer. He is the kind of man I dislike most, narrow-minded and dictatorial. He does n't want Marian to go to college."

"Don't he? Well, I don't know as I blame him. When you 've got a girl grown up to your mind and old enough to take her mother's place, it must be kind o' hard to have her go off for four years."

"But Martha, just think of it! He does n't

want her to carry out the great wish of her life, and yet he calmly goes off to Europe every summer and leaves her behind. He must be very selfish."

"Every man that amounts to anything is selfish, Miss Lesley. It's the kind that don't succeed that has time to stand round. That's the reason so many women are unselfish. They have n't got anything better to do."

"Mr. Northbrook is selfish and unsuccessful. He is past forty, and he does n't seem to have accomplished anything."

"I should think being a college professor was a job that would take a good piece of his time. You are dreadful set against Mr. Northbrook, Miss Lesley. Now I never was a great admirer of men. They are kind of an obstinate, cantankerous lot; but it ain't their fault the Lord did n't give 'em as much common sense as he gave women. They can't help being men, poor things, and I guess Mr. Northbrook is a pretty good sort, as men go, judging by the children. Miss Marian is a sweet young girl, so modest and unassuming, and Charlotte is real cute, and that little Stephen, that looks like Miss Marian cut down and put in trousers, is the best-behaved boy I ever saw. You would n't know he was a boy if you judged by his manners. Hal is a handful, I admit; he's more trouble than the other three all put together, but he's real good-hearted."

"I am glad you like them so much, for you will

thoroughly enjoy having them come to dinner to-day."

That was the merriest dinner party Lesley had ever given. When she was with children she was apt to forget that she was grown up.

They were all charmed with her, and this new interest softened her disappointment concerning Amy, for a still greater blow had fallen upon poor Lesley, — Amy was to be married in a few weeks. In a measure it was Lesley's own doing. Miss Ward had casually mentioned in a letter that Dr. Washburn was eager to have the wedding at once, but that Amy did not feel it right to break her promise to Lesley, whereupon Lesley had written impulsively to urge Amy to give up her visit to her and be married when the doctor wished, and she had proposed going to Renton for a fortnight to help Amy through the wedding. The engaged pair accepted her offer by return mail, and with such eager gratitude that she felt still more forsaken. It was a strange thing, this love that could make two people so absorbed in each other that they hardly had a thought for their dearest friends. The unselfish Amy had become temporarily an egoist. A touch of humor was added to the situation by the doctor's proposal. He said he did not mean to be selfish, and magnanimously suggested that he and Amy should make a visit to Lesley a part of their wedding journey.

"You will have to be very good to me," Lesley said to the Northbrooks, when they came to din-

ner, "for my best friend, who I told you had put off coming, is to be married. You'll only have a week more of me now, for I am going to stay with her for a fortnight."

"Father will be here by the time you go," said Hal.

"I thought your father was to be away all summer?"

"He was," said Marian, "but Miss Knight wrote him she had to leave because she was ill, and that she could n't come back. I did n't want her to tell him, for it seemed a shame to spoil father's trip abroad, but she would do it, — she said it was her duty; and as soon as he got the letter father cabled he was coming home on the next steamer. We got the message this morning. He will be here in less than two weeks."

"Isn't there any one who could have come to stay with you, so that your father's plans need not have been broken up?"

"Only Aunt Madeline, and she can never leave Uncle Henry for more than a few days. Uncle Henry is an invalid, and he can't bear to have her out of his sight. He does n't like to come here, because the noise of the children disturbs him. She can only leave when he can be with his mother and sister, but he hates to have her away, even then."

"You seem to be getting on very well without any older person. It is so cosy just as it is."

"Yes," said Hal, "but father did n't know

about you. You are just as good as an aunt. It will be lots jollier when father is here, only he won't stay, that's the worst of it. He'll get us settled with another housekeeper and then he'll go off again; we just get used to having him and then he goes."

"He is with us all the rest of the year, but he gets tired teaching and needs a change," said Marian loyally.

Lesley had made up her mind that she was not going to like Mr. Northbrook, and therefore everything his children said only accentuated her impression that he was a rigid martinet, who always carried out his own plans at the expense of others. She even had a distinct idea of how he looked, imagining him with Hal's restless dark eyes and aggressive chin, combined with gray hair and a sallow complexion. She fancied that he was old for his age, and that he had a nervous, formal manner and the irritability that she had often noticed in the habitual student. Lesley was glad that Mr. Northbrook would not reach Mount Desert until she was in Renton, and hoped he would have completed one of his flying visits before she came back.

In the excitement of the fortnight that culminated in the most charming house wedding that Renton had ever known, Lesley almost forgot the existence of the Northbrook family. It was not until she was on the City of Bangor, bound for Mount Desert, that she had time to give any con-

secutive thought to her young friends. Lesley had received a letter from Marian the night before, that she only half read. She meant to put it in her bag, but in the confusion and hurry of the last morning it was left behind. She had read far enough, however, to discover that Mr. Northbrook had spent a week at Mount Desert and gone away again.

It was a gray cheerless afternoon. The clouds hung low over the horizon and threatened a night of fog. When Lesley decided to go by boat she expected her usual good luck and counted upon a moonlight evening. She felt very young and unprotected as she was jostled by the crowd on her way to the steamer, and heartily wished that she had taken Mrs. Madison's advice and gone by train. After she had left her bag in her state room she went to the upper deck, sure of having it to herself while her fellow passengers were eating their table d'hôte dinner. The evening was cold, but Lesley was so well wrapped up that the wind was only a pleasant tonic. She found a sheltered corner, and took out of her lunch box the appetizing sandwiches that Mrs. Madison had insisted on preparing, and some hard-boiled eggs and peaches. She also found a large slice of Amy's wedding cake. The unexpected sight of it made her acutely homesick. The evening before, everything had been so gay and bright and Amy was so happy that it had been easy to part from her; but here, alone in the fog, Lesley felt utterly desolate.

When dinner was over a few of the more enterprising passengers came straggling up on deck. They did not especially interest her, but it was more amusing to watch them than to let her thoughts dwell on herself. An elderly woman followed her husband to the top of the gangway, sniffed the wind, and then said in a complaining treble, "Charles, is this what you call mild?" and went down again with the rapidity of the king of France. A middle-aged man who must be a stock-broker or a bank president, Lesley concluded, because he fairly bristled with aggressive prosperity, lighted a cigar, turned up his coat-collar, and began to pace the deck. Then a young couple came up and sought out a sheltered seat. He was tall and straight, she small and plump, and her gray traveling suit was so preternaturally fresh that Lesley was sure they were on their wedding journey. She was equally certain that the bridegroom was an army officer. A handsome, stiff-looking individual came next, who Lesley was confident was a clergyman, and he was followed by an unmistakable commercial traveler. Finally a man came on deck who did interest her. She wondered why he carried so distinctly the marks of charm and good breeding. He was not handsome, — the clergyman's features were more regular; nor was he especially well dressed, — the bank president's ulster eclipsed his; nor was there anything unusual about his figure: he was of medium height and of medium proportions, — the army officer was his su-

perior there. And yet, for some indefinable reason he was the only one of them whom Lesley had any desire to know. She decided that he was an architect, who had not yet achieved his own fortunes, that he was about thirty-five years old, and unmarried. The voluble commercial traveler waylaid him, so that Lesley had some moments in which to complete her inspection. His voice was pleasant, and his manner so courteous that she was sure he must have had the training of a gentle mother, and the discipline of a family of sisters. The commercial traveler, having finished his cigar, went down to the cabin, and the architect began to walk along the deck, as the others had done, but unlike them he stopped when he came to her. "I beg your pardon," he said, "but is n't this Miss Chilton?"

"Yes, I am Miss Chilton."

"I hardly need introduce myself, if my children have given you as accurate a description of me as they gave me of you. You have probably already guessed that I am Henry Northbrook."

Bewilderment changing to surprise were visible on Lesley's expressive face.

"Evidently the description was n't equally exact," he said.

Lesley put out her hand. "I am so glad to know you," she said cordially. "No, they did not give me any idea of what you were like."

"Well, I knew you at once. I was told you had dark hair and dark eyes, and that you wore a

gray golf cape and would be sure to want to sit in the windiest part of the upper deck. I was told, too, that you were almost as good fun as if you were a boy. That is the highest praise Hal can give."

"There can't be anything quite such good fun as to be a boy of Hal's age," she returned. "They are the most delightful companions in the world."

"Except girls," he rejoined. "I can't bear to have Marian growing up."

And so this was Henry Bowen Northbrook! This sympathetic man with the half-humorous, half-sad eyes and the genial manner that could not fail to win every one! Lesley could hardly adjust herself to the discovery.

She looked at his light hair unstreaked with gray, and at his sunburned complexion, that in the waning light looked almost as free from lines as little Stephen's, and smiled when she remembered her mental picture of him. She wondered if his impressions of Ann Smith were equally correct.

"It is a foggy night," she said, drawing her golf cape closer around her.

"Don't tell me you are cold and want to go inside. That would completely spoil my idea of you."

"No, I like it much better on deck."

"So do I," and he drew up a camp-stool and sat down near her. "I didn't see any one who answered to your description in the dining room," he continued, "and I made up my mind you had

gone by train. I came up on deck when dinner was over to make sure. I suppose you got Marian's letter saying I should try to take this boat?"

"No, — yes, I did get a letter from her, but I was in such a whirl when it came, I didn't half read it."

"Martha — by the way, what a delightful personage she is" —

"I like your choice of terms," Lesley interpolated.

"I am glad it suits you. Maid, servant, house-keeper, — one's sense of propriety refuses them all. Martha begged me to take this boat; she said she had done her best to try to persuade you to come back by train, but that you were" —

"A very headstrong, self-willed young woman," Lesley finished. "And now I am going to surprise you by owning that I was so lonely a few minutes ago I heartily wished I had gone by train. Don't tell Martha!"

"Heaven forbid! How could you think me capable of such treachery? There is something about Martha that is as convincing as fate," he went on. "I don't see how you managed to assert yourself and come by boat. I had meant to leave my sister a day or two earlier, and get back to my unprotected children, but when Martha asked me if I could not come to-night, I simply had to."

"I am very sorry to have been the indirect means of upsetting your plans."

"You needn't be. I don't mind changing my

plans any more than the weathercock does. By the way, I have induced my sister to come to me later, to fill in the gap until she finds a house-keeper for me. You will like my sister."

"Is she anything like Marian?"

"Yes, and no. She is a middle-aged woman, ten years older than I, the kind of woman who makes younger women seem crude, she is so well-poised and complete."

"I know the kind," said Lesley, feeling crudely young.

They talked for a time about journeys by train and boat, and then discussed books. Finally Lesley made a vivacious movement that hit the lunch-box in the camp-chair by her side, and sent it flying. The cover opened and let out a hard-boiled egg that meandered along the deck, but Amy's wedding cake fortunately stayed in the box.

Mr. Northbrook gathered up Lesley's property and restored it to her gravely.

"Thank you," she said, "that was very awkward of me. You need n't look so sober,—I give you leave to laugh. How absurd that egg looked! I'll give you some of this wedding cake as a reward for your services," she added. "I have just come from a friend's wedding. Did my biographers tell you that?"

"Yes."

"The dearest friend I have in the world was married. That is why I was feeling so blue to-night."

"I don't think I ought to have any of her cake," he protested. "I am sure Martha will want some."

"I have some boxes of it in my trunk." She broke the slice and handed him half.

They ate the cake in a sociable silence.

"It is very good," he said, when he had finished his. "I hope the wedding was equally successful?"

"Yes. It was a perfect wedding, and they are going to 'live happily forever after,' but it gives me a curious sensation when I have always been first, to find myself pushed so far into the background that I am literally out of sight. She is a jewel among friends, there is no one like her. She always let me have my own way, and seemed absolutely happy in giving it to me, and she thought me the most perfect and charming person in the world. You look surprised; I admit that it was not discriminating of her. That is why she is so wholly delightful, because she has no insight into character. And now she has given a shy, silent, commonplace man the same blind adoration."

"He is a very lucky fellow."

"Indeed he is. And to do him justice he knows it. He looked all the time as if he were walking on air."

"That method of walking is pleasant while it lasts."

"Oh, but it will last with them," Lesley returned quickly. "I am sure of that. Why are you so skeptical?"

"Because I have lived a good many more years than you have."

"But you don't know my friends."

"My dear Miss Chilton, no two people can live together year in and year out and still keep all of their illusions."

"You are a pessimist," she said with a little disapproving shake of the head. "Your biographers never told me you were a pessimist."

"I am forty-two years old. That is all that is the matter with me."

"You mean you did not feel as you do now when you were my age?"

"Yes."

"You think I am going to feel as you do when I am forty?"

"I am afraid so."

"Never, because I have no illusions to lose. I can see my friends' limitations, but those two have the temperament that, where it exists without the power of expression, makes idealists of people instead of poets, and so they will always live on the heights. It is wonderful," she said softly, half to herself. "I would rather see things the way they are," she proceeded, after a little pause. "If Amy were here she would think this fog gave poetic charm to the voyage, while I must confess I vastly prefer moonlight; but as there is a fog I shall try to make the best of it."

"Is that your attitude towards life?"

"I had n't thought so far ahead as that, but I rather think it is."

"And suppose you should get shipwrecked in the fog? Would you still make the best of it?"

"What a discouraging person you are! I should love that. It would add a touch of excitement to my quiet life."

"And suppose you went to the bottom?"

"I am not that kind. I should be found clinging to a spar."

"I rather think you are right," he said with a little laugh. "I should go to the bottom, but you would come out on top of the wave."

"Of course I should. Waves would n't have tops if it was n't meant that some of us are to get there."

"When I was your age I expected to 'get there' myself by this time. I was sure of being the president of a college."

"That proves the difference in our characters," she told him demurely, with a mischievous glance that he lost. "I have so few illusions that I have never imagined such a future for myself."

"But you are a woman, that makes all the difference."

"Not as I look at it. There are all sorts of things I want to do, only being president of a college does n't happen to be one. But before I settle down to anything I want to travel and study and go on with my music and see people. Just now I am having a breathing space."

"I am glad I happened to make your acquaintance during your breathing space," he said heart-

ily, "for I don't like women with a career, they are so self-centred."

"And you think this is only true of *women* with a career?"

"No, but one expects women to be more sympathetic than men."

"Why is n't it equally important for men to be sympathetic?" she persisted.

"Miss Chilton, I am off on a vacation and I don't want to discuss the woman question."

"But suppose I do want to discuss it? Is n't it quite as important for me to have things the way I like them?" she asked, with one of her disarming smiles.

"Yes, but is n't it possible we might find some safe middle ground? We have n't discussed all the books we have read; and art, science, music, the higher mathematics, and a few other topics are still left us."

Afterwards it seemed to Lesley as if, in the hours that followed, she had rashly dabbled in all the subjects about which she knew least. Her decided views seemed to amuse her companion, who took a good deal of pains to draw her out. She was conscious that he was not taking her as seriously as she wished, and she was afraid he thought her even younger than she was; but she could not find it in her heart to resent this, for he had a sense of humor that matched hers so well that to talk to him was an exhilarating process. Finally there came a hiatus in the conversation, and Les-

ley had time to notice that every one else had gone down. Moreover, the wind had shifted, and it was growing cold.

"I must say good-night," she said.

"Why?"

"Because I am sure it must be getting late."

"What difference does time make on a night like this, when the fog whistle won't allow you to sleep?"

"There is a conventional prejudice in favor of making the attempt."

"You do well to call it a conventional prejudice."

"To-morrow is still a day," she quoted.

"To-morrow is never the same day, Miss Chilton. 'The moving finger writes, and having writ moves on.' It is better to make the most of to-day."

"I will leave you to make the most of it," she said, wanting to stay a little longer, but still more anxious not to flatter him by yielding to his wishes.

"I am sure Martha would advise you to get the full benefit of my society," he said in persuasive tones. "It is considered very improving by many persons, and besides, I want to ask you what you think of the 'Rubáiyát.' We have not discussed Persian literature."

"I don't approve of the 'Rubáiyát,'" she said, with her usual decision, tempered by her low voice. "It is so horribly pagan."

He seemed amused. "Some day I will read it to you and make you see how beautiful it is."

"Will you? I am afraid my biographers have given you no idea how hard it is to make me change my opinions. Good-night."

"And so, having decided without sufficient thought to bid me good-night, you are going to persist in it, although I have proved that it is a physical impossibility for you to go to sleep? The excess of every virtue is a fault. Never changing one's mind, when one makes a hasty decision, is" —

"Obstinacy," she put in promptly, as she moved towards the gangway. "Yes, I suppose I am obstinate. It is the obstinate and selfish people who are found on top of the wave. I am not half good enough to be a failure. That is why I expect to succeed."

During the noisy hours that followed, when Lesley could only catch brief snatches of sleep, on account of the omnipresent fog whistle, she looked forward to the next morning with vivid interest. "I have made a friend," she said to herself. "How strange it is, for I thought he would be an enemy." And then she went over the conversation of the evening and chided herself for her lack of reserve. What must Mr. Northbrook have thought of her comments on her friends and the freedom with which she gave her opinions? How egotistic she had been! for now she came to think of it, he had said very little about himself. To-

morrow she would draw back and show him that she was not lacking in dignity. Oh, how good it would be to have to-morrow come!

Lesley was very sleepy the next morning when the knock came that told it was time to dress for the change of boats at Rockland. When she went into the cabin she found the fog was thicker than ever. All the excitement of the previous night had gone. She was hungry and cold and wanted to avoid Mr. Northbrook. She was sure she should not like him half so well by daylight, and wished she could keep the last evening as a detached episode. Mr. Northbrook had qualities that might irritate her, and as soon as he knew her views on the suffrage question he would probably not like her any more. As the moments passed and she saw nothing of her new acquaintance she was seized with the uncomfortable suspicion that he wished to avoid her. Why what in her case seemed perfectly natural was wholly unjustifiable on his side, she did not ask herself.

"Miss Chilton," said a pleasant voice, "I have been foraging to see if I could n't find something to eat. They give us breakfast on the other boat, but I thought you might be hungry now and like some rolls and coffee. They have them in the dining room, if you care to go down."

Mr. Northbrook's manner was less genial than it had been, and Lesley no longer felt a desire to confide in him. On the contrary there seemed a barrier between them. It was true, what he had

said, that to-morrow is never the same day. It was not until they were on the upper deck of the other boat, having eaten an uncommonly poor breakfast, that either of them had any impulse towards conversation, and even then what had been so spontaneous the evening before was difficult now.

Lesley never forgot that strange journey in the fog. It was so thick that the land, even when close by, was only a dim shadow. She and Mr. Northbrook stationed themselves in the bow, near a man who shouted the approach of danger to the captain on the bridge. Every now and then the phantom apparition of a schooner would loom up, so close at hand that it startled them. The blowing of the fog whistle was answered by other fog-horns, and there was a pandemonium of warning bell buoys. At North Haven the bride and bridegroom left them and were borne away in a small rowboat through the enveloping fog.

"Curious impression that makes on one," Mr. Northbrook said, as he and Lesley watched them vanish into the unknown. "It is oddly like life."

"Yes," she said, with a little shiver.

It was not until they had almost reached North East Harbor that the fog cleared. Suddenly there was a marvelous shifting of scenes; the gray curtain was rolled up, and a view of surpassing beauty was spread before them. Far away in the distance were the mountains, softened by the mist, and looking like one's dream of a celestial country, while the sea was of a wonderful shade of

blue green, and the line of firs around the shore completed the harmony of color.

"Oh!" Lesley cried. "Have you ever seen anything so beautiful?"

"Having made the best of the fog, you will now try to put up with the sunshine?" Mr. Northbrook said.

"Don't you like sunshine best?" she asked.

XI

MOUNT DESERT SUNSHINE

DAYS of sunshine followed, — days when even the most confirmed pessimist must have owned that life had an admixture of good. Mr. Northbrook was far from being a confirmed pessimist. As Lesley saw more of him he seemed to her a man whose natural buoyancy was in abeyance, but could not be extinguished. He was able to get pleasure from the fleeting moment, in a boyish way, and as Lesley knew that he had no thought beyond his temporary gratification, she saw no reason why she should not make the most of the entertainment that fate provided. She was sure that when Mr. Northbrook knew her opinions on the suffrage question his pleasure in her society would be considerably lessened, and she put off disclosing her views from day to day. She knew this was cowardly, but she could not bear to bring questions which would create dissension into the harmonious little company.

Lesley had seen the children almost every day before she went to Renton, and the morning after her return they came over, eager to renew the stimulating intercourse. Mr. Northbrook almost always joined them on their walks and rows, and sometimes took them on a sail; and often in the

evening when the younger children were in bed, Marian and her father would come over to beg Lesley to play to them.

Martha viewed the growing intimacy with a jealous eye.

"Miss Lesley," she began one day when she and her young mistress were making sandwiches to be taken on an afternoon's excursion, to an island, "it seems to me it would be just as well if you asked more people to go on your picnics."

"They are not my picnics. If the Northbrooks ask me I can't very well suggest their taking other people."

"I should want a variety if it was me. I should want to see something of the Lanes and Allens."

"But they are so tiresome, Martha,—they have n't two ideas in their heads."

Martha stopped cutting bread, and held the bread knife uplifted in her hand. "If it was me," she said, "I should n't want to be quite so pleasant to a man with such a lot of children, for fear he'd misunderstand, and think I'd be willing to take a permanent job."

"Martha! How can you say such things! Mr. Northbrook understands women, and knows I should n't be so pleasant if I cared the least bit about him. He does n't care about me, either,—how could you think such a thing? He is nearly twenty years older than I am to begin with."

"All I can say is, Miss Lesley, that when Miss Emma Ward comes, if you go on as you are doing

now, it'll get all over Renton that Miss Lesley Chilton is going to be married to a widower with four children."

"Oh, hang Miss Emma Ward! Don't look so shocked; I like Miss Emma, but I wish I had n't asked her here. You have spoiled all my pleasure," she added, in an injured tone. "I came away from home to escape being watched and criticised, and if you put such ideas into my head you will make me so conscious that I shall be perfectly miserable. It makes me so angry! Is there no age a man can reach when he can be friends with a woman without having people think he is in love with her? Let them think it, then! Let every one say all the hateful things they like! I shall not let it make any difference."

And yet it was impossible that Martha's words should not make a perceptible change in Lesley's manner that afternoon, in spite of her resolutions to the contrary. She took her place in the sailboat as far as possible from Mr. Northbrook.

"Hal," she said, "let's sit up in the bow; it will be much more fun."

"Don't sit there," Hal's father remonstrated, "it is n't nearly so sociable. Sit where I can have the benefit of your conversation."

"That is just what I am trying to prevent; I am going to tell Hal stories, and I never let grown people listen."

"We want to hear the stories too," cried Stephen and little Charlotte.

Marian stayed to help her father sail the boat, but the others clustered as near Lesley as they could get. She took a perverse pleasure in addressing all her conversation to the children, throughout the sail, and when they reached the island she went on ahead with Hal and Stephen, leaving Mr. Northbrook to follow with his daughters, after he had moored the boat. She could not avoid him permanently, for as soon as she had arranged their simple fare under some sheltering fir trees he unceremoniously ousted his oldest son, who was sitting next Lesley, and flung himself down on the grass by her side.

When tea was over, he said, "Miss Chilton, you have given my children quite enough of yourself. Now it is my turn. I want you to tell me a story."

"What kind do you like best?" she asked, as she shook the crumbs from the tablecloth into her lunch basket. "Shall it be a fairy story, or something that really happened?"

"A fairy story," cried the children.

"No, you have had your innings. I want a true story."

"Very well," said Lesley. "I will tell him about my being a suffragist," she decided. "Then he won't like me half so well, and nobody will say any more disagreeable things."

Lesley had never looked more dainty and feminine. She wore a white duck suit with a black ribbon around her waist, instead of her usual black

dress, for it was a hot afternoon. She seemed a creature made for happiness, and it was hard to remember that she had lately had a great sorrow. The wind gave her a color even brighter than usual, and her eyes sparkled with mischief.

"I am going to tell you how I became a woman suffragist," she said, in an ominously gentle voice.

"You are not a woman suffragist!" exclaimed Mr. Northbrook.

"Of course I am, and I expect to convert you. Or are you one already?" she asked sweetly.

"Come now, Miss Chilton! You don't really believe in woman suffrage?"

"Why not?"

"Because — because you are not the sort of person to believe in it."

"I fancy I was born a woman suffragist, but I didn't know I was one until I was almost through school and wanted to go to college. A friend of mine was going as a matter of course. He was four years older than I and only one class ahead of me in the high school. Every one thought it perfectly natural he should want to go, and unnatural that I should, although he was n't nearly so quick at his lessons as I."

"Then I should think he would have needed college more," said Hal.

"My aunt was very much opposed to a college education for girls," said Lesley, not heeding this observation, "and she sent me to a boarding-

school, where I had a good chance to take music lessons, and learned very little besides, and when I came home and saw my friend in his vacation, and found how much he was growing, I made up my mind that I would go to college; and finally when dear Aunt Irene saw that my heart was set on it she generously gave in and sent me."

"Was it chiefly a desire for knowledge that made you want to go?"

"Mr. Northbrook, I am positively ashamed of you. Of course it was a desire for knowledge."

"I beg your pardon. I have known cases where girls wanted to go to college from mixed motives."

"Well, anyway, I went, and I enjoyed it immensely."

"I have no doubt you did."

"Why do you smile in that provoking way?"

"I was smiling at my thoughts."

"I suspected that. I was wondering what they were."

"I was thinking how remarkably little a college education had spoiled you."

"That sounds well, but I am afraid you are thinking that remarkably little of the knowledge I got there has stuck. But isn't it something to have spent four happy years? Four absolutely happy years?"

"A great deal, Miss Chilton. Most of us are grateful to have spent four absolutely happy days."

Lesley was not going to be diverted from her

purpose by this subtle compliment. "My friend went to the law school after college," she continued, "and when he came home and began to practice law, he had a much more interesting life in Renton than I had, although he was slow and plodding, and without original ideas. It was then I began to wish that things were more even, and that it was as much a necessary part of a woman's life to have a career as of a man's."

"But Miss Chilton, it is perfectly easy for a woman to have a career as things are now. Why do you want to increase your responsibilities by adding the suffrage to them?"

"Because it would be so much simpler. Now when we want things, town improvements for instance, we have to influence some man to put them through. I will give you a humble example. Behind our house there was some vacant, marshy land that sloped away towards an Irish settlement. The summer I came home from college I found stagnant water there, with a green scum on top. My aunt was delicate, and I knew it was a danger to her health. Nobody paid the least attention to me at first, because the land had been undrained from time immemorial, and it was only after an exceptionally wet season there was any trouble. Dr. Washburn was on my side, but he was too busy to help me, and Nathan — my lawyer friend — said it was a pity. I asked him if he would not draw up a petition for me to take to the selectmen, so that the case might come up in

town meeting; after a long time he did it, and he agreed to get the neighbors' signatures, but I knew it would be some days before he would do it, so, to save time, I took it around myself; and I visited one of the selectmen afterwards, and put the matter before him. My friend spoke for the measure at town meeting, and I gave them no peace until that land was drained."

"According to your own showing, Miss Chilton, you managed very well without having a vote."

"But think how much simpler and fairer it would have been if I had had one."

"If all women were like you —"

"I know what you are going to say," Lesley interrupted, "you are going to make the usual remark that if all women were intelligent you would not dread their having the suffrage."

"No, I was going to say that if all women had your intelligence they would not need the suffrage, for they would find a way of getting what they wanted without it."

Lesley controlled her irritation and said serenely, "I wish I could impress you as I did my friend. I converted him."

"Are you engaged to him?" Hal asked.

"Oh, no," she replied quickly, "we are only the most matter-of-fact friends."

"Then I don't see where the story comes in. Can't we go to the lighthouse, father?" Hal had been frankly bored for some time.

"You boys can go on if you like, and we'll

come presently. I strongly object to the company you keep," he said, turning to Lesley. "I never heard a woman suffragist speak in public who had not lost something of her womanliness. They all have harsh voices, ugly clothes, and an aggressive manner."

Lesley leaned forward in eager protest. "Then you have been unfortunate in the women you have heard. I wish you could hear some of those I have heard. It is n't an easy thing for a woman to speak in public, and if many of those who do are the more pronounced of their sex, we other women, who have n't the courage to lift our voices, should be grateful to them. If you say such things you will drive some of us into public speaking, to show that ours is the cause of girls who care for the graces of life, as much as it is that of the hard-worked, badly-paid women."

"I should be very sorry, Miss Chilton, if I were the means of making you take to stump speaking." He smiled as he looked into her vivacious face.

"You will not take me seriously."

"Because you take yourself quite seriously enough for both of us."

"When I make a speech in public about woman's rights, I shall invite you to come and hear me," she told him.

"That is good. I will come any distance to hear you. You shall have the stimulus of my unqualified disapproval joined to a large bunch of red roses."

"How perfectly delightful! You make me long to take to the platform at once. Meanwhile, I suppose we may as well take to the lighthouse," she added.

"I am afraid you haven't made any converts this morning," he said. "The audience has dwindled."

"Marian agrees with me. Would n't you like to go to college if you could, and vote if you could?"

"I should like to go to college," replied Marian, glancing shyly at her father.

Lesley's attempt to make Mr. Northbrook disapprove of her by divulging her views on the suffrage question had not met with signal success. On the contrary she seemed to have afforded him fresh amusement. She was vexed with him, and started for the lighthouse at a rapid pace, drawing Marian's arm through hers.

Charlotte grasped her father's hand, and insisted upon his inspecting a bird's nest she had discovered in a neighboring tree.

"I found it myself, father, and I would n't tell the boys, for fear they'd frighten the birds," she said.

"If you new women see everything before we get there," he called out, "meet us at the float."

"We had better wait for father," Marian suggested timidly.

"If he wants to catch up with us he will," said Lesley.

"No, I am afraid he won't. Father always expects us to wait for him."

"Does he?" and Lesley quickened her pace.

When Lesley and Marian reached the lighthouse, they sat down on the doorsteps to wait for the others. The beauty of the view gave them exquisite enjoyment. The quiet sea shimmered in the sunset light like an opalescent inland lake, and opposite them lay Mount Desert, with its undulating outline of mountains, broken here and there by solitary firs that lifted their heads above the others. Some white sails came slowly past them, and were followed by a red one, that seemed stained with the sunset. In the midst of the pink glow in the west, a frail crescent moon, that looked hardly larger than a silver thread, was setting. Lesley pressed Marian's hand, for words seemed inadequate.

"If all days were like to-day I should like to live a thousand years," she said.

Marian glanced up at her in surprise. "You seem very happy," she returned.

"Who could help being happy on a day like this. Are n't you happy?"

"Yes," Marian answered doubtfully. "But I am thinking how soon it will be over, to-day and the other days like it."

Marian had never enjoyed anything in her whole life as Lesley could enjoy. Hard times had come to her when she was only ten years old, and ever since her mother's death she had felt

weighed down by the cares and responsibilities of life.

When Mr. Northbrook and Charlotte joined them a little later, Lesley and Marian were still sitting on the doorsteps, with the lighthouse as a background for their young figures. Marian's arm was drawn through Lesley's, and her blond head was close to Lesley's dark one. As Mr. Northbrook glanced at them, the grave expression on his daughter's face made her look the older in experience of the two. She was very dear to him, this child with her mother's eyes, and with a sympathetic nature that her mother had not possessed. He was glad to have Marian with some one as light-hearted and healthy-minded as Miss Chilton, but he was grateful to the heart's core that his daughter had the serious disposition that made her a far more congenial companion for him than if she had had Lesley's cast of mind.

XII

AMY COMES

"GUESTS, like misfortunes, never come singly," said Martha.

"Martha Gibson! How can you make such an odious comparison!"

"I guess, Miss Lesley, if you had all the work of the house to do, and had the blankets on your mind, you would n't take company quite so lightly. If it stays hot we're all right, but if we have a cold spell, I shall have to steal your blankets for Miss Emma Ward's bed, she's one who likes a sight of blankets, and you'll have to get along with a shawl."

"All right."

"It does seem unfortunate the Washburns should have set this time to come," Martha continued. "Seems as if you'd have Miss Emma continually on your mind. However, you and she can pair off and leave the bride and groom to themselves."

"I could never stand that. Do you suppose Miss Emma would think it very rude if I put her off until after the Washburns go?"

"I should think she'd like it a good deal better than playing second fiddle to a bride," said Mar-

tha, "and the little spare room is n't big enough to swing a cat in."

"Oh, I was planning to move in there, and let Miss Emma have my room, but it will be much simpler to put her off."

"It does seem too ridiculous," said Martha, as she smoothed out a snowy quilt on the bed in the large spare room, "when I think how many times I've fixed up this room for Miss Amy when she's backed out of coming, and she one that hates to give unnecessary trouble. Well, it wan't her fault. I hope the doctor will black his own boots. I'll do most things, but I draw the line at blacking boots. Are you going to let him smoke in the parlor?"

"Certainly, if he wants to."

"Well, you *are* easy going! I wish the doctor wan't so tall and so absent-minded. Sure as fate he'll run his head into the hall lantern. Well, if he smashes it he'll have to get us another. Men are a great nuisance. Don't forget to order the sirloin steak, Miss Lesley. Dr. Washburn will be sure to want something hearty."

"With your views about men, I don't think it consistent in you to pamper them as you do."

"You'd ought to be starting for that boat now," Martha rejoined, ignoring this remark. "You've fixed those red poppies as well as your aunt could. How flowers do brighten up a room! *She'll* notice them, and like as not *he'll* never see them, unless he happens to knock the vase over."

This time Lesley did not wait for the boat in vain. The Washburns were on deck, and waved to her as soon as they came in sight. Lesley had never seen such a change in any human being as in Amy, and Dr. Washburn's face was almost equally illuminated. Amy was one of the first to leave the boat, and she ran forward and gave Lesley an ardent embrace, wholly oblivious of spectators, while the doctor looked as if it were only by a great effort that he kept himself from following her example. Lesley held Amy at arm's length for a moment, taking in every detail of her improved appearance, from her radiant expression to the becoming blue shirt waist that matched her eyes.

"You do look well," she said.

They drove back to the house, Lesley and Amy both talking at once, while Dr. Washburn maintained a friendly silence on the front seat; and that evening they all sat together, and the next morning they all took a walk together, and in the afternoon they all went for a row. Lesley was oppressed with the inevitableness of Dr. Washburn. She liked him, but who was he to have thrust his big blond personality between her and her dearest friend?

"Would you rather go for a row or a walk?" she asked Amy, on the second morning of their stay, and Amy replied, "I think Andrew would rather have a row."

Lesley had intended to leave Andrew behind, meaning to suggest that he should go to call on

the Lanes, who proved to be old acquaintances of his, but Andrew took it for granted in an exasperatingly cheerful manner that Lesley was as pleased to have his society as Amy was.

That evening Mr. Northbrook called and invited the party to go for a walk the next morning. It was a relief to Lesley to have him fall to her share, as they started out.

"I must tell you how much I like your friend," he began at once. "She is all you said of her and a great deal more. You did n't tell me she was so charming and so sympathetic."

"She never was before. She has been waked up and become a new being. She said of herself she had always lived in a chrysalis."

"They seem very happy," he said, letting his eyes wander to Amy and her husband, in the vista of fir trees ahead of them.

"They are, — I never saw two happier people, — but a man on a vacation is a most oppressively omnipresent being, don't you think so? I have been used to having Amy all to myself, and it is peculiarly trying never to be able to see her apart from her husband."

"Poor fellow!" said Mr. Northbrook. "What do you suppose it is to him to have you always round? And when he is on his wedding journey, too. If I had n't had some compassion on him and detained you, you would be walking on ahead now with Mrs. Washburn."

"So that is why you have suddenly grown so polite to me?"

"Yes, I did n't mean to tell you."

"I am so glad you had a chance for a real talk with Amy last evening, and that you like her."

"I like her immensely. I never saw a woman who came nearer being my ideal."

Notwithstanding this fact there was a piquant flavor about the beginning of the walk which the end of it lacked, for, after resting in the woods, there was a change of companions, and Mrs. Washburn fell to Mr. Northbrook on the return trip. Henry Northbrook was philosophical, however, and if he could not enjoy himself in one way he did in another.

The Washburns stayed ten days, — a period of time that slipped away in the rapid fashion in which happy days go. Shortly before Amy and her husband left Mount Desert, Mrs. Winship came to make her brother a visit.

"I suppose I must go and call on Mr. Northbrook's sister this afternoon," Lesley said discontentedly. "You must come with me, Amy, for I can't afford to spend any time away from you. I may as well get it over with; I know I shan't like her."

"Why do you think that, when you like him so much?"

"Oh, from things he has said. He thinks her perfect. I never get on with perfect people. We are not 'birds of a feather.' I know she will make me feel terribly young and unfinished."

The moment Mrs. Winship came into the room,

however, in her gently rustling gray gown that harmonized with her hair and the darker gray of her eyes, Lesley changed her mind. She saw that Mr. Northbrook's sister was one of those high-bred women who are so sympathetic that they make their acquaintances appear at their best. She was sure that in her presence the dull found themselves suddenly grown bright, the clever scintillated, and the shy became at their ease.

"I am so glad to see you both," Mrs. Winship said. "This is Miss Chilton, I am sure," and she turned to Lesley, "and this is Mrs. Washburn. My brother has told me so much about you both that I feel we are old friends already."

And before the call was over she had made Lesley and Amy feel so too.

"What a dear Mrs. Winship is!" Lesley said enthusiastically, as she and Amy were walking home through the narrow path in the woods that led from one house to the other. "Don't you wish you had gray hair and were fifty? There is a kind of disembodied spirit quality about her. It is as if she had no hopes or fears for herself. How peaceful it must be! I wonder what her husband is like! He is awfully lucky."

"Mr. Winship is a nervous invalid," said Amy. "But Mr. Northbrook says his sister is perfectly wrapped up in her husband and he in her. Mrs. Winship kept house for her brother until her marriage. She was a great loss to him, but his wife was living at the time, so his sister was n't deserting him."

"You have found out more about Mr. Northbrook in the short time you have known him than I have in three weeks. I talk too much myself. Look out, Amy, you 'd better hold up your gown," and Lesley stooped to detach a bramble from her friend's skirt. "It is a very becoming gown, by the way."

"Andrew likes blue, so I wear it to please him."

"I like blue, but you never wore it to please me."

"I never used to think much about clothes."

"Amy, I don't know what I am going to do when you go," said Lesley. "I almost wish you had n't come. I was getting on fairly well, and now" —

"Now you will have Mrs. Winship and her brother and the children. I feel quite at ease about you."

"Oh, my dear, my dear! As if any number of Northbrooks could fill the gap! In two more days you will be gone. Horrible thought! You are such a comfortable person. A house seems so furnished with you in it, and so unfurnished without you."

"If it was n't for Andrew" — Amy began.

"But there has always got to be Andrew now."

They turned a corner, and there he stood in the path facing them, his broad shoulders blocking the way. Fortunately he was too far off to have heard Lesley's speech; she was sure of that by the smile of good cheer on his face.

“I thought you were never coming,” he said as they approached. He looked at Amy, and Lesley dropped behind, for that glance shut out the world. She let them walk abreast in the path that was not wide enough for three, and wondered how long it would be before they noticed that she had fallen behind. They went on between the gently whispering trees towards the rosy glow at the end, without once turning to look back, and Lesley, with mingled feelings of gladness for them and selfish unhappiness, knew that she was forgotten.

XIII

RAIN AND MUSIC

THE Washburns had gone, and Miss Emma Ward had not yet come. Lesley felt very lonely as she sat down after tea before her solitary fire. A light rain had developed into a furious northeast storm, and she was thankful her guests had decided to go home by train. The wind shook the house and the rain beat against the windows. Lesley felt so homesick that she almost decided to slip on her mackintosh and make her way up to the other house, but pride withheld her. If the storm was so bad as to keep the Northbrooks from coming to see her, it was certainly too severe to allow her to go to them. She did not wonder that Mrs. Winship and Marian did not dare to venture out, but it would have been neighborly of Mr. Northbrook to drop in and cheer her in her loneliness. But men were all selfish, and the more charming they were, the more they were able to indulge their selfishness in unmolested peace. They did precisely what they liked. If it had been a moonlight evening and the Washburns had been staying with her, Mr. Northbrook would have come over for his own amusement, but because it stormed, and she was too depressed to be entertaining, Mr. Northbrook stayed away. When

Lesley made up her mind not to go to see the Northbrooks she took off her short skirt and shirt waist and put on a thin black evening gown, for she liked to maintain the semblance of good cheer. Then she began to play a nocturne of Chopin, and before long she forgot the selfishness of men.

As Lesley played, all the romance and fire which she hid in daily life beneath a sense of humor, came to the surface. She had smiled at Amy and Dr. Washburn, but deep down in her heart was the feeling that such affection as theirs was the one thing that made life worth living. She did not want it to come to her for many years, it was too absorbing, and yet she could not but have a sensation of loneliness, as the door shut that left her outside. She played one nocturne of Chopin's after another and then a part of the Tschaikowsky Pathetic Symphony. At last she paused and turned on her piano stool to look over her shoulder at the tall clock in the hall. She gave a little cry of surprise, for there, sitting in a high-backed chair, was Mr. Northbrook.

"How you startled me!" I didn't hear you come in. How long have you been there?"

"For some time," he said apologetically.

"Why didn't you come into the parlor?"

"Because I was afraid you would stop playing if I did."

"But I always play to you if you ask me."

"I know you do, but I found I liked your playing better when you were playing to yourself."

Please don't stop! I was sure that was what would happen."

Lesley had an unreasonable pang because he liked her music better than her conversation. "You must sit by the fire and get dry," she said, pushing up an armchair. "And I am going to ask Martha to make some hot chocolate for you."

Lesley returned presently with a little tray bearing two cups of chocolate, and some Peek and Frean wafers. She sat down on the other side of the fireplace.

Her expressive face now seemed radiant with life and good cheer. "Don't tell me I must play any more," she said. "I am very blue and must be amused."

"I don't believe you know what it is to be blue," he said, as his eyes rested on her charming profile.

"Don't I look blue? That is because I have on an evening gown. An hour ago I felt as if I had lost my last friend."

"I was afraid you would be lonely after the Washburns went, and I was coming down to see if you would n't take tea with us, but when that fearful downpour came I thought even your adventurous spirit would quail."

"I should have come with the greatest pleasure. I never mind weather. I thought you knew me well enough for that."

"I was sure one's own fireside, when it is a fireside like yours and includes one's own piano, held out superior attractions on a night like this."

"And you really thought I should rather stay at home alone than take tea with all of you just because it rained?"

"I really thought so."

"How little you know me!"

"I think of you as the most independent woman I know."

"Independent people miss their friends, — I miss Amy horribly."

"Even although Dr. Washburn was so omnipresent?" he asked her with dancing eyes.

"Yes, I even miss him. He was very useful in building fires," she added pensively, as she took the tongs and stooped to pick up a recalcitrant brand.

As Mr. Northbrook saw her dark hair and her tanned face framed by the warm brown wood of the mantelpiece he thought instinctively of a sepia sketch.

"Miss Chilton, that fire is going out, if you'll allow me to mention it. May I build it up for you? I don't like to see you struggling with it, and I can't be outdone by Dr. Washburn. I want you to 'even miss' me, when I go off."

She handed the tongs over to him without a protest, and took her embroidery out of her work-basket, while he rebuilt the fire with a practiced hand. They were both of them in a mood for talking, and the hours passed quickly. At last he said how sorry he was that he had to go away for a few days the next week.

"It must be fascinating to be a man, and able to go when and where one likes," was her comment.

"But the point is I am not going when or where I like. I did not say I wanted to go. I said I was sorry I should have to go."

"With a man one is usually a synonym for the other."

"Is it? If you were a man I think you would reconstruct some of your ideas; it is n't such an easy job as you imagine."

"Well, as I can't be a man, the next best thing will be to have equal rights with you," she assured him demurely.

"It has always seemed to me as if, under present conditions, a woman had what Hal would call 'a soft snap,' " he said. "I am afraid you would n't enjoy your rights after you got them. For one thing, you would have had to wrestle with this fire," and he glanced at the blazing logs, "while I should have sat by and enjoyed your discomfiture."

"By saying we have a soft snap do you mean you would prefer to be a woman?" she asked in her lowest, sweetest tones.

"Heaven forbid!"

"Of course you would n't as things are now, but if we had equal rights with you, you would n't mind so much."

"If I had to be a woman I should much prefer present conditions. I should n't want all my woman's work to do, and a man's added to it. As

things are now you have many advantages we don't possess."

"What are some of them?"

"I won't say anything about your being shielded and taken care of,—that is too obvious. But take for instance all the stages of the intercourse between men and women. You have the whole thing practically in your control."

"Upon my word, this is a new point of view!"

Lesley stopped working on her embroidery and seemed to be preparing for combat.

"For instance," he went on, "a woman decides whether she should like to have a man come to see her. If she asks him to come, he either has to risk her thinking him rude if he does n't go, or risk being bored if he does. If he goes he has to decide whether he shall go again. He can't wait at his ease for the woman to return his call; then perhaps she asks him to dinner; if he accepts he has to make his dinner call, and if"—

"Does he?"

"I am talking about what he ought to do. Multiply this by twenty, which I take to be a conservative estimate of the average man's feminine acquaintance, and you at once see the difficulties he is surrounded by. All you have to do is to decide whether you want to have him come to your house."

"Please forgive me for deciding I should like to have you come."

"Of course I was n't thinking of you."

"I know you were n't, but I could n't resist saying that. Go on; I am very much interested in your point of view. After a man has winnowed out the chaff from the wheat and decided which women do not bore him, what happens next?"

"Then he is just beginning to enjoy himself when some relative or friend of the wheat is sure to think 'there must be something in it.' Multiply this by ten, for we will suppose our average man lucky enough to find ten women he likes, and you will at once perceive his pathway is not the straight and narrow road you thought it was."

"It is much worse to be a woman," she said with emphasis. "We'll suppose a woman asks ten men to come to see her, — I am thinking now of small New England towns where men are not numerous, — and that those who come oftenest are the very ones she cares for least, while the men she prefers have n't time for it. What can she do about that? Absolutely nothing. She cannot even winnow out her chaff. A girl I know defines society as 'always talking to the wrong man.' Now no man would ever define it as always talking to the wrong woman."

"Would n't he?"

"No. It is his own fault if he wastes any time talking to the wrong woman. All he has to do is to make a bee line for the right one."

"That sounds very simple," Mr. Northbrook agreed, "but suppose the wrong woman is next him at a dinner?"

"I should be so silent she would n't want to talk to me, and as soon as I joined the ladies after dinner I should go straight to the right woman."

"But suppose she had put herself behind a group of wrong women? Then a man naturally infers that although she may be the right woman he is the wrong man."

"That is where he would make his mistake. Ten to one she would put herself in that corner because she wanted to talk to him."

"Then according to you it is an encouraging sign when a woman avoids a man?"

"Not necessarily; it depends on the woman. It is quite as likely to mean that he is the wrong man."

"You have given me absolutely no new light on the woman problem,—what a woman means is as much a mystery to me as it ever was."

"Women are only mysterious because men are so," Lesley informed him. "Just so long as men seem to be equally satisfied to talk to the wrong woman, women will appear to like to talk to the wrong man."

"But Miss Chilton, there are generally half a dozen women who are the right woman. If all six are present on the same occasion a man is sure to enjoy himself, but if only one is there, he has to say a few words first to his hostess, and to some of the others, and by the time he gets around to the right woman"—

"By that time she has made up her mind he is n't coming to speak to her," Lesley put in, "and so she has made herself very agreeable to the wrong man."

"And naturally our hero thinks she would rather talk to the other man," Mr. Northbrook said.

"Then he is very stupid."

"No, he is merely very modest. I wish I could convince you, Miss Chilton, of the great humility of my sex."

At this moment Martha's figure appeared in the doorway, and she said in disapproving tones, "Miss Lesley, it is five minutes of eleven, and as I have all my washing to do to-morrow I am going to bed. Will you put out the lights when you come up?"

Mr. Northbrook rose hastily. "I must be going. I beg your pardon, Martha, I did n't know it was so late. I am sorry to have kept you up."

Martha was somewhat mollified. "It rained so hard to-day I did n't attempt to do my washing," she remarked.

"It must be a real trial to have to put it off," he said sympathetically.

"It is."

"And that clothes-line must be enough to try the patience of a saint," he added, for Lesley had confided Martha's tribulations to him.

"Good land, Mr. Northbrook! How do you know that reels are superior to lines?"

"I haven't kept house for the last eighteen years for nothing."

"I didn't mean to make you go, Mr. Northbrook, — I was only saying Miss Lesley might as well put out the lights."

"It is quite time for me to go, Martha. I have been trying to convince Miss Lesley of the difficulties of being a man, and to show her how humble-minded we all are, but I haven't succeeded."

"Well, I guess you won't ever succeed, Mr. Northbrook, not until your sex meets with a change of heart."

"Tell Marian I was so sorry she could n't come this evening," said Lesley.

"I will tell her. I wish she could have heard you play. The next time you are going to play when nobody is listening to you do send word to us."

As the front door closed Martha said, "I wonder why it is that men with light hair and gray eyes are so apt to have 'a way' with them!"

"Nathan Hart has light hair and gray eyes," Lesley said. "Do you think he has 'a way' with him?"

"He has a very good way with him, Miss Lesley, a much more to be depended on way than Mr. Northbrook, but he ain't what you'd call fascinating, Mr. Hart is n't."

"And you think Mr. Northbrook fascinating?"

"I might," Martha conceded grudgingly, "if I could n't see so well just the kind he is."

“What kind do you think he is, Martha?”

“A good kind to a few, but misleading to the rest. He’s a good father, you can see that, and I should n’t be surprised if he was a good teacher, but he’s the sort that likes to be pleasant to everybody, and next summer he’ll be just as pleasant to Mrs. Hallett’s servants as he is now to me.”

XIV

MR. NORTHBROOK CALLS ON MRS. WARD

"HENRY, why don't you try to get Miss Emma Ward for a housekeeper?" Mrs. Winship asked.

Mr. Northbrook was helping his sister up a rough mountain path through the woods, for she had an untrustworthy ankle. It was a rare thing for Mrs. Winship to have her brother's company on these walks; indeed she had had many opportunities for getting to know Miss Emma in the last few days, for these two ladies generally brought up the rear. This afternoon, however, Lesley, Mr. Northbrook's usual companion, had perversely gone on ahead with Hal.

"Miss Ward is practical, efficient, and absolutely self-effacing," Mrs. Winship proceeded, encouraged by her brother's silence; "she would n't be any more in your way than the paper on the wall."

"Mrs. Washburn is the kind of housekeeper I should like," he said. "She is equally self-effacing and she is interesting — Look out, Madeline, you 'd better take my arm here."

"Mrs. Washburn is a rare woman," his sister agreed heartily. "She is attractive in that subtle, indescribable way that is as little to be analyzed as the perfume of a flower. Miss Ward is n't

attractive, I admit, but she is a lady, and of a suitable age, and she is very fond of the children; look at her now."

Miss Ward was self-effacing even in her clothes. Her neutral-tinted outing suit blended with the colors of the forest. She had a slight figure and an erect carriage, and was at her best when out of doors. Little Stephen, with the chivalry which had characterized him ever since he had been able to walk, was giving his hand to Miss Emma to help her over the hard places. It was plain to see that she was humoring him and letting him think she needed his stalwart aid.

"Upon my word that is very nice of her," Mr. Northbrook said, "I did n't know she had so much tact."

"She would be a great improvement on Miss Knight."

"Miss Knight did find a good deal of fault," he admitted, "and the worst of it was, she was always in the right. I am under no illusions about my family, but I can't drown two or three of my children to make things easier for the housekeeper. I doubt if I could get Miss Ward if I wanted her," he added. "She has an invalid mother."

"There is another sister at home. They are very much straitened, Miss Chilton says. You could go to see the mother next week. Is there anything you ever really wanted that you did n't get?"

"Plenty of things, Madeline. You, for instance. I wanted to have you live with me always."

"And I should be living with you still, if Henry Winship had n't wanted me a great deal more than you did."

"I have sometimes wished that Henry Winship had never been born."

"Henry! You know you would have lost one of your best friends in that case."

"But if I had never known him I should n't have realized the loss he would have been. Well, poor old Henry! I don't grudge you to him, Madeline."

Mr. Northbrook was always hoping to find the ideal housekeeper, a second sister Madeline. When their father died, she went to live with her brother, and was with him during the early years of his married life, filling the gaps in such an unassuming way that it was only after her own marriage that he discovered how many of them there had been.

When Henry Northbrook was in the early twenties he had fallen tempestuously in love with Eleanor Rice, a brilliant woman, some years older than himself, who had been amused by his devotion in the intervals when she was separated from the man to whom she was secretly engaged. In the revulsion of feeling that followed the announcement of Eleanor's marriage Henry Northbrook had been attracted to Maria Newell because of her steadfast religious nature and thoughtful eyes. After his marriage to her he was slow to recognize the fact that those beautiful eyes did not

mean quick sympathies, and slower still to admit that he and his wife lived in as separate a world as if they were on the opposite banks of a river across which they could make no bridge. Maria Northbrook was without sense of proportion, and it seemed to trouble her equally that her husband was not a "professing Christian" and that he sometimes tracked in mud over her hall carpet. In the narrow and arid region known as her mind, she came in time to have a half-contempt for her husband. She would have respected him more if he had found fault with her, but he silently let her go her querulous way, partly from a dislike of scenes, partly from a growing indifference.

His wife's death, which set the seal on all possibilities of a better understanding, had been a great shock to him, and he still had a feeling of self-reproach because their marriage had been a failure. In the months that followed Maria's death he had gone over and over their life together, blaming himself for his absorption in his own pursuits and lack of interest in hers. Perhaps, as she had intimated more than once, he was peculiarly unfitted to make a woman happy. However that might be, he had not the faintest intention of marrying again. He had been too thoroughly disillusioned, but if his life was somewhat sombre in coloring, it held its compensations, for he was interested in his work, and his young daughter was growing to be the kind of woman he had hoped to find her

mother. And into this tranquil existence had walked Lesley, as unexpectedly gay and cheerful as the notes of hope in the midst of the autumnal sadness of the first movement of the Tschaikowsky Pathetic Symphony. It never once occurred to Mr. Northbrook that his young neighbor might become a disturbing feature in his life. He liked her as simply and frankly as if she were an engaging child, and with as little thought of future complications.

The more Henry Northbrook meditated upon what his sister said about Miss Emma Ward, the more he felt inclined to agree with her, and the day before Miss Emma went home he approached her on the subject. She returned a doubtful answer, saying she should like to take the position, but that she was afraid her mother could not spare her.

"If that is all the trouble," said Mr. Northbrook, "I think I can persuade your mother to agree."

Miss Ward gave a sigh, which said as plainly as words, "You don't know my mother," and because of this obstacle, Henry Northbrook, who the day before had felt by no means sure he wanted Miss Ward for a housekeeper, now made up his mind that he must have her, and even went to Renton to intercede with Mrs. Ward.

When the Washburns found he was coming to town they asked him to stay with them.

It was a bright summer afternoon when he

walked over to the Wards' house and asked for Miss Emma. When he saw the prim parlor with the old-fashioned horse-hair sofa and the blinds closed to keep the sunlight from fading the ugly Brussels carpet, he did not wonder that Miss Emma had fallen a victim to circumstances. It was the older sister who came in to see him. He marveled at her cheerful aspect, and wondered why she had not fallen a victim to circumstances.

"I have heard about you from my sister," Miss Cynthia said. "She is in the garden, I'll call her."

"Don't disturb her if she is busy. It is really your mother whom I have come to see. Perhaps your sister has told you what I want."

"Yes, and Emma would like to go to you, and there is really no reason why she should n't, but mother will not hear of it."

"Can I see your mother?"

"Mother does n't generally see strangers."

"I suppose not. I thought, under the circumstances, she would make an exception and see me."

Miss Cynthia smiled. She had been won over already by his friendly manner. "I'll ask mother if she'll see you," she said.

She was gone some minutes, and during that time Miss Emma came in. She had on a linen gown made with absolute severity, and seeming of a piece with her lustreless hair and sallow complexion. She was very stiff and cold, much stiffer than she had been at Mt. Desert.

Presently Miss Cynthia came down. "Mother wants to know if you are the Mr. Northbrook who wrote the article against the higher education for women," she said, pausing in the doorway.

He was somewhat aghast to have his views summarized in this manner. "I wrote an article that I suppose is the one she means," he replied, "stating some objections to college life for women."

"She liked the article, and she wants to see you. That is a great concession from mother, but she says she is seeing you on account of the article, and she hopes you clearly understand that she does n't want Emma to go to you."

"Very well. I should like to see your mother, and my doing so commits her to nothing, although of course I can't help hoping I may make her change her mind."

Miss Cynthia led the way up a narrow, old-fashioned staircase to a large room that had been as nearly spoiled as possible. And yet the ugly black walnut furniture, the marble-topped table, the hideous carpet, and even the chocolate brown wall-paper could not wholly counteract the impression of good cheer made by the sunlight, as it streamed through the half-opened blinds.

Mrs. Ward was sitting upright in her wheelchair. She had a straight, almost military back, that gave her a proud and adequate appearance, in spite of the crippled condition of her limbs. Her hair was almost as black as her eldest daughter's, and her black eyes had lost nothing of their fire.

In one crippled hand she held a cane with which she pounded on the floor when she wanted to summon a daughter from the parlor below.

"Mother, this is Mr. Northbrook," said Miss Ward.

Emma had come in quietly behind her sister and was sitting in a straight-backed bedroom chair.

Mrs. Ward looked at her visitor with a shrewd, penetrating glance.

"I am very glad to have the honor of seeing Mrs. Ward," he began.

Mrs. Ward gave her head a little toss, which seemed to say, "You are not going to take me in with any of your pleasant speeches."

The halma-board with the men resting in a half-fought battle stood on the marble-topped table.

"I have interrupted a game of halma," said Mr. Northbrook; "that is a pity. I am very fond of halma."

"Are you?" Mrs. Ward remarked in a tone of such dry skepticism that Mr. Northbrook, although he really was fond of halma, felt a disconcerting chill. She was certainly a very formidable old lady.

"Miss Chilton sent you a message," he said. "She told me if I saw you to give you her love."

"Miss Chilton sent me her love when Emma came home."

"Miss Chilton is a charming girl," he continued, feeling that the conversation must be sustained at any cost.

"Yes," said Mrs. Ward, "Miss Chilton is charming, but very headstrong. I offered that girl a home with me. It is n't often I feel sufficiently drawn to any one to make such advances."

"I should imagine not," Mr. Northbrook said.

This spontaneous observation interested Mrs. Ward in her visitor.

"Yes, I do not take to every one," she reiterated, "and so my good opinion is worth the more, but Lesley Chilton preferred to go her own way and live by herself. It is most unsuitable for so young a girl to live alone. I am sure you agree with me, since you wrote as you did about women. Lesley Chilton is a good example of the harm that is done by a college education."

"But mother," said Miss Cynthia, "Lesley was just as decided before she went to college."

Her mother gave her a glance that seemed to say, "Who asked you to put in your oar?" and Miss Cynthia was silent.

"I have a daughter who will be old enough to go to college next year," said Mr. Northbrook, "and she is eager to try it. She is n't very strong, and besides I can't bear to lose her out of my life for four years, and yet she has had so little of the society of girls of her own age, that I sometimes wonder if I am making a mistake in opposing her going. What do you think, Mrs. Ward?"

"I certainly should n't let her go, if she were my daughter."

"I often ask myself whether it is n't pure selfishness on my part."

"Very likely it is," assented Mrs. Ward, "but it would be pure selfishness on her side if she went, and it is better that you should be selfish for your good and hers, than that she should be selfish for her harm and yours."

"There is something in that." Mr. Northbrook was beginning to be interested in this spirited old lady.

"There is a great deal in that. I have lived more years than I like to remember, Mr. Northbrook, indeed I shall be eighty-five if I live until January, and of course I have learned a few things."

"Mother has excellent judgment," said Cynthia.

"Yes, I should imagine that she had good judgment," Mr. Northbrook agreed; "that is why I hope to make her see why it would be a good plan all around if she would let Miss Emma come to help Marian run the house. It would be cruel to expect so young a girl to keep house and take care of three children."

"Of course you need some one, but I don't see why you must have my daughter."

"The children like her; that is a great point. It is a hard position, but Miss Emma seemed to think she should like to try it for a year. I would n't ask for more than that at first; in that time we could see how things worked; and I would let her come home for two weeks at Christmas."

"I should like to go," said Miss Emma faintly.

"If she wants to go it seems to me she is

old enough to be allowed her own way," said Cynthia, but this was going too far, as Mr. Northbrook recognized.

"I know I am very selfish," he said quickly, before Mrs. Ward had time to answer her daughter.

"I am glad you don't try to smooth over the fact," his antagonist remarked.

"I don't believe it would be possible to smooth over anything with you, Mrs. Ward," he rejoined. He had the exhilarating sense of having met his match.

"I am not going to pretend it is an easy place," he went on. "It is n't. They are good children, as children go, but they wear their clothes out very fast, and put their toes through their shoes with incredible speed. Marian is a saint; a sweet, almost pathetically sweet, young girl who has had no fun but the fun of doing her duty, if any joy can come from that—I have always been doubtful about it myself. I am off most of the time except in the evening, when I am with the children perhaps four nights out of the seven. Miss Ward could have those four evenings to herself."

"Why do you expect me to let my daughter go to a place that you yourself say is hard?"

"I don't know. Except that when one wants a thing one naturally expects to get it."

"I suppose then you have been in the habit of getting what you wanted?"

"Not always. Sometimes."

"Have you always liked what you have got?"

"That is a different matter."

"If my daughter went to you, you are by no means sure to be satisfied with her."

"That is true."

Mrs. Ward, on her side, began to grow interested in the game.

"Your daughter would have a good many chances for enjoying herself," Mr. Northbrook said. "To a woman who has lived in a small town the theatres and music and lectures are an attraction, and if she has any friends in New York" —

"Our brother lives there in the winter with his family," said Miss Cynthia, "and we have a cousin in New York, Mrs. Frank Hallett; perhaps you know her?"

"Yes, I do. They were my neighbors at Mt. Desert last year. What does your son think of the plan?" he asked, turning to Mrs. Ward again.

"He likes it," she assented grudgingly.

"And you think, on the whole, although it is a hard place, you would like to come to us if your mother can spare you?" he asked Miss Emma.

There was a little color in Miss Emma's sallow cheeks, and her whole soul seemed to shine through her eyes. "I should like to go, because I am so fond of children," she said.

It seemed pitiful to Henry Northbrook that a woman should have lived so barren a life for nearly fifty years that such a position as he offered should

be hailed by her with joy. Here was the old-fashioned, home-loving woman, the woman without any of the modern ideas, who could brew and bake and make her own clothes. He thought of Lesley Chilton, in the pride of her arrogant youth, and wondered what she would be at fifty. If self-abnegation, carried to its extreme limits, produced a Miss Emma Ward, what would independence make carried to an extreme? He could imagine Lesley a bright-eyed, high-colored maiden lady, — something of the type of Miss Cynthia Ward, — with her naturally sweet manner grown more self-assertive, and her tongue more caustic. He hardly liked to fancy what her opinion of men would be after an interval of twenty-five years of strenuous competition with them.

“How long are you going to be in town?” Mrs. Ward inquired, when, after fifteen minutes’ talk on general subjects, Mr. Northbrook rose.

“Until day after to-morrow.”

“Come and see me to-morrow,” she said imperatively.

Henry Northbrook’s mind was full of Lesley Chilton, as he walked back to the Washburns’. He almost expected to see her come out of the old-fashioned white house opposite Mrs. Ward’s. It was a pleasant house, and he had a strong desire to go in and see the rooms where she had lived. The front room on the right must have been where her piano stood. He caught a glimpse at the back of the house of a garden full of holly-

hocks, gladioli, poppies, and sweet peas. It was a delightful garden, and he longed to go inside and explore it.

The following afternoon Mr. Northbrook went again to see Mrs. Ward. This time her manner was considerably softened.

"You are punctual to a minute," she said approvingly, as she looked at the clock.

They talked on desultory subjects for a time, and then Mrs. Ward approached her favorite topic, the woman question, and they both agreed that the world was not half so desirable a place to live in as when they were young, and that this was owing to the fact that women had so much liberty. Nothing was said about Mrs. Ward's daughter until Mr. Northbrook was taking his leave. Then he observed, "If you change your mind about Miss Emma you can let me know, or perhaps you may think of some one else who could come to us."

"You haven't got to go yet, have you?" Mrs. Ward asked regretfully. "I may not be here the next time you come this way. You are sure to be here again, for, sooner or later, every one comes back to Renton. My son is here for the summer. He's away to-day, but he'll get back to-night. I wish you could see him before you leave town."

"I should be glad to see him. Where does he live?"

"Just across the way."

"Oh, in Miss Chilton's house?"

"Yes."

"I almost wonder she could make up her mind to leave such a pleasant home," he hazarded.

"It was lonely for her, after her aunt's death; that was why I asked her to live with me, and I was n't the only one who wanted her. The Madisons asked her to live with them, and Nathan Hart, Mrs. Hallett's brother, and my girls' cousin — I am not letting out any secrets, for every one knows he's been wanting to marry Lesley ever since she was seventeen. And she won't have him. He's as reliable as a Waltham watch with first-class works in a silver case. Well, I don't know as I blame her so much about that. There are some folks who are almost too steady-going, Mr. Northbrook, and Lesley is the kind who likes a watch in an enamel case with pearls better, even if it don't keep such good time."

And so Nathan Hart was in love with Lesley Chilton! Mr. Northbrook had met him at the Washburns' the evening before, and had not been especially interested in the young lawyer, but now he felt sorry for him. The man who was in love with Lesley Chilton would have a hard row to hoe. A girl like that would not be easily won, but her soft eyes, and the quality of her music that evening when she thought she was alone, spoke of possibilities that would have stirred his heart had he been in the twenties. He was half inclined to envy the man who was destined to awaken those sleeping affections, but he was glad that he himself had reached the tranquil harbor of middle life.

Mr. Northbrook had his hand on the door when Mrs. Ward called him back.

"I have been talking to my son about Emma's going to you," she said, "and he thinks the change will do her good. If you would be willing to have her try it till Christmas, I'll consent to that. I'm not at all sure she'll suit you. Emma's a good deal like Nathan Hart. They are first cousins on the Ward side. There is no lethargic Ward blood in me, thank heaven! Nathan Hart's mother was Florence Ward, my husband's sister. Emma is as reliable as a human being ever was, but who wants a woman to be so deadly dependable? One of our few advantages is that we are privileged to change our minds. I have changed mine, Mr. Northbrook, and I am willing to have Emma go to you. Maybe it will wake her up. I only wish I were young enough to go to you instead."

"I wish you were, Mrs. Ward, with all my heart."

The next morning, on his way to the train, Mr. Northbrook called again to bid Mrs. Ward good-by, and to make the last arrangements with Miss Emma, and afterwards he rang the bell of the white house opposite, and asked to see Mr. Ward.

Mr. Ward was out, and so was Mrs. Ward. A dark-eyed little girl peered at Mr. Northbrook from between the portières of the parlor door, as he made his inquiries.

"How do you do?" he said. "I have a little girl at home just about your size. Her name is Charlotte. Is that your name?"

The small person, who was sucking her thumb in a fit of embarrassment, shook her head.

"I am going to guess your name," he continued. "Is it Emma?"

She shook her head again.

"Is it Cynthia?"

The little girl took her thumb out of her mouth and looked at him in surprise.

"It is Cynthia! Isn't it funny I should have guessed right? Now as your father and mother are out you will have to entertain me. Suppose you take me into the garden and let me see the flowers."

The small person looked at him doubtfully, but after giving him an intent scrutiny she apparently made up her mind that he was to be trusted, for she led the way through the long hall and took him out of a door that opened on the piazza on the back of the house. Beyond it was the garden. It was a garden full of sunshine, and reminded him of Lesley.

"There's the kitty!" Cynthia cried, dashing off to capture her favorite. She returned with the large yellow cat hugged up close to her. "Does your little girl have a kitty?"

"No."

"How too bad! The kitty belongs to me and Peter," she told him. Her tongue, once loosened, was making up for lost time. "Peter owns the head, and I own the tail. I wanted the head, but he made me have the tail, and now he will pull it,

although it belongs to me. Peter has gone to drive with papa and mamma. Mamma is only going to market, and then she 's coming back; I was to have gone with them, but I was naughty, so I had to stay behind. Is your little girl ever naughty?"

"Yes, very often, I am sorry to say."

"Does her papa leave her behind to punish her?"

"Sometimes."

"Is her mamma sorry for her?"

"She has n't any mamma."

"No mamma?" Her lips drooped. "But she has you," she added, as a cheerful afterthought; "you have to be papa and mamma too."

She chattered on about one thing after another, while Mr. Northbrook put Lesley in different parts of the garden; now on that rustic bench with her gentle invalid aunt, now by that group of brilliant scarlet poppies, and now over there, picking the sweet peas. He wished he could have a bunch of those sweet peas to take to her. She would like something that had come from the old garden.

"Do you want some flowers?" Cynthia asked. "I'm sure mamma would n't mind if I picked some sweet peas. I like the pink and white ones best, don't you? The purple and white are the old ladies, that 's what Peter and I call them, and the pink and white are the young ladies."

"Did you ever see the young lady who used to live in this house, Miss Lesley Chilton?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. I love her. She is so sweet and

dear. The kitty used to belong to her. I am so glad I was naughty to-day," she confided to him; "because if I had n't been naughty I should n't have stayed behind, and if I had n't stayed behind I should n't have seen you, and I love you, — I love you very much."

"I am so glad, for I love you very much."

At this moment a stout, placid lady with hair brushed straight back from a high forehead, and a general disregard of the becoming in favor of the comfortable, came out on the piazza.

"Mamma," Cynthia said, "oh, mamma, I'm glad you've got back. Here's a gentleman that came to see papa, and I've been showing him the garden, and the kitty, and I want to give him some sweet peas."

"I shall have to introduce myself, Mrs. Ward. I am Henry Northbrook. I have just been to see Mr. Ward's mother, and stopped to see him, on my way to the train."

"Mamma, may n't I pick him some sweet peas?"

"Certainly, if he wants them. I hope my little girl has n't been troubling you. Would you really like the sweet peas? Or will they be more trouble than they are worth?" It was a hot morning, and Mrs. Ward looked as if almost anything would be more trouble than it was worth to her. She sat on the bench fanning herself with her broad-brimmed hat, while Mr. Northbrook and Cynthia picked the sweet peas; and when he went to the

station he was richer than when he entered that garden, having acquired, not only a box of sweet peas, but Cynthia's undying affection.

At the other end of his journey Henry Northbrook was greeted with enthusiasm by his four children, who were at the boat to meet him. They all insisted upon going with him to see Miss Chilton. He had imagined, when he should give her the flowers from her old garden, an interview full of the ideal grace that attends a friendship between a man and a woman, even when it is untouched by sentiment, but four children tagging along after him were enough to turn any scene into a comedy.

Lesley was at home, and was unaffectedly glad to see him.

"It was very good of you to stop here on your way," she said, as she shook hands with Mr. Northbrook. "I am longing to know all about everybody, how the Washburns seem in their own house, — I am madly jealous, by the way, that you made them a visit before I did, — and I am dying to know whether Mrs. Ward is going to let Emma come to you. And did you see the Peter Wards? And are they taking good care of the place? And is the cat well fed?"

"Miss Emma is coming to us, the Washburns are ridiculously happy, and everybody sent you their love, including the cat, who is fat and prosperous, thank you, but a little injured in his mind because Peter Ward, Jr., will pull his tail."

"Poor fellow, it must be a sad change for him."

"Guess what father has got for you in that paper box," said the irrepressible Charlotte.

"Something for me! How delightful! I can't guess what it is."

"It is something pretty and sweet," said Charlotte, climbing into Lesley's lap, and putting her vivacious dark little face up to be kissed. "Do you know Cynthia Ward? She's about as big as me, and she had been a naughty girl. I have been a very good girl. Do open the box, Miss Lesley."

"I'll cut the string for you," said Hal, "it's got a lot of knots in it."

"I can untie them," said Stephen.

The mercurial Charlotte slipped down from Lesley's lap and stood by her side.

Lesley opened the box and gave a little cry of delight. "Sweet peas! How good of you! Are they from my garden?"

"Yes, Cynthia and I picked them for you. I wish I could have brought some of the sunshine with them."

"You have. I can see it all, the velvet grass and the old gnarled Baldwin apple tree, and the hollyhocks and poppies, — no poppies were ever so scarlet, — and the bench under the maple tree where — everything is quite the same except" —

Her eyes filled with tears, her lips trembled, and she broke down for a moment.

Little Charlotte slipped an arm around her. "Don't cry," she said, "it is too bad you can't be

in the pretty garden, but you mustn't mind so very much, for you 've got me to play with."

Lesley pressed the little girl's hand, and then looked up gratefully at Mr. Northbrook. "The garden is so full of Aunt Irene," she said. "She always liked to help me pick the sweet peas, even when she was not strong enough to do it. It is strange, isn't it, how we can go on, day after day, with our memory blurred and the keen edge of our sorrow dulled, and all at once some little thing — a book, a strain of music, a flower — will suddenly make the past alive."

"I did n't mean to trouble you," he said gently.

"You haven't. I am glad to have the sweet peas. I love them better than any flowers in the garden. And I am glad — yes, I am glad to remember. It isn't living, when we forget. Marian, if you will ask Martha to give you the green glass bowl, I'll put my sweet peas in water."

"They are not even very fresh," said Mr. Northbrook regretfully. "I only meant to give you pleasure, and I have brought you faded flowers and painful recollections."

"The flowers will revive."

"And the recollections?"

"They will grow sweeter, too. The pain will go and only the happiness be left."

XV

A MIRAGE

"WHERE is Marian?" Lesley asked, as she opened the door to let in Mr. Northbrook one evening.

"I forgot all about Marian," he confessed. "You see it is 'the last call,' as they say on trains. I'm off for good to-morrow. Marian was upstairs when I left the house. I hope you'll forgive me. You'll have plenty of chances to see her. Besides, I want to read the *Rubáiyát* to you, — it is the third time I've brought it over; I never get any chance when Marian is around."

After they had talked for a few minutes in the perfunctory way of friends who wish to ignore the fact that they are to part, he took the slim brown volume from his pocket.

Lesley had never been so stirred by any poetry. The reader's voice made the Eastern world real to her, and she was permeated with the glow and passion of the poem, its languor and fragrance, and that subtle, indescribable combination of pagan abandonment to the joy of life joined to the mystic vision of the seer.

He read on without comment until he approached the end of the poem. Then he said, "The last six verses are as exquisite as anything I know in the English language."

“‘Yet Ah, that Spring should vanish with the Rose,
That Youth’s sweet-scented manuscript should close.
The Nightingale that in the branches sang,
Ah, whence and whither flown again, who knows ?

“‘Would but the Desert of the Fountain yield
One glimpse — if dimly, yet indeed, revealed,
To which the fainting traveller might spring,
As springs the trampled herbage of the field.’”

He paused.

“I suppose we all of us have that glimpse,” he said. “It is only a mirage, but it is what makes life possible.”

“Why do you call it a mirage? Isn’t it more real than anything else?”

“No, for unfortunately it is the tantalizing glimpse, not of what may be, but of what might have been if — there is always that unfortunate little ‘if’ coming in. Spring does ‘vanish with the rose’ and ‘youth’s sweet-scented manuscript closes,’ worse luck! I wish I were fifteen years younger!”

“I don’t wish I were,” said Lesley, making an effort to free herself from the spell that his reading cast upon her. “Life was very hard for me fifteen years ago. I was always smashing my dolls and having to put up with new ones. I smash my dolls still, but I have grown to look forward to the new ones with delight.”

“I have n’t the smallest doubt of that.”

As he went on reading, Lesley stiffened her back until it became rigid, and said to herself that

she would not yield to the strange fascination of the poem. Why should it seem so different to her from what it ever had before?

“ Ah ! Love ! could you and I with Him conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would we not shatter it to bits — and then
Remould it nearer to the Heart’s desire ! ”

Mr. Northbrook read.

Lesley had a swift vision of the remoulded world, a world where there was always youth and freedom, where men and women held such enlightened views that a serious friendship between them was possible. But Mr. Northbrook was in a narrow rut and held the ideas of a past generation ; so Lesley continued to stiffen her back and clenched her hands very tight, and said in a cheerful voice, “ Mr. Northbrook, I never realized before that Omar Khayyám was a suffragist. He says if we could only — give me the book, I can never remember anything. If we can only —

“ ‘ conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would we not shatter it to bits — and then
Remould it nearer to the Heart’s desire ! ’ ”

That is what we are trying for, and if you men would help us to ‘ shatter it to bits ’ and ‘ remould it,’ the millennium would come.”

Mr. Northbrook closed his book with unnecessary force, and without reading the two last verses. Lesley knew that he was displeased with her flippancy, past the power of words, but, nevertheless,

in order not to betray how much she was feeling, she continued lightly, "I shall put that verse into my next article on the woman question."

"Your next?"

He slipped the *Rubáiyát* into his pocket, and he too stiffened perceptibly.

"Yes. I always meant to tell you. I wrote an article, — I wonder if you happened to read it? It came out in 'The School and the State,' and was signed 'Ann Smith.'"

"You don't mean to say you wrote that article, — you?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"It was a very clever article —"

"And that is the reason you think I could n't have written it?" she interrupted with a smile.

"I thought it was written by a schoolteacher in the forties," he acknowledged.

"I am proud to think that my written words carried such weight. Perhaps my spoken ones will appeal to you more now. You see I am as wise as if I were a schoolteacher in the forties."

"You don't look the part."

"I shall, if I live long enough. Not that I want to be a schoolteacher. Did you really think that article clever?"

"Yes. It made me angry though, and I came very near writing to you."

"I wish you had. It would have been such fun. Why did n't you?"

"I was too busy, and I was afraid I could n't

write a letter that would be polite enough to send. If I had known it was you"—

"If you had known it was I you would n't have minded being impolite? I should like to see you angry. You made me furious by some of the things you said in your article. For instance, you implied that all women are inferior to the average man."

"You assumed that I implied it. That was one of the things that vexed me."

"And you seemed to think that all women should be tied down inside the four walls of their own homes. That is a very convenient doctrine for men to take, by the way, for if women are tied down, it leaves men free to roam when and where they please. I thought you were a very dictatorial, irritating man."

"And I thought you were an aggravating, exasperating woman."

"And yet we are most amicable off paper. It shows how little one can judge."

"It shows," he returned smiling, "that a woman is much more agreeable when she is 'inside the four walls of her own home.'"

"I was when I wrote that article. It shows that a man is more agreeable when he is n't troubling himself about a woman's sphere."

"Well, you are not going to have me troubling you any more. You will be left to the undisturbed enjoyment of whatever career you choose."

"Without any advice from you?"

"Without any advice from me."

"But I don't mind having advice given me — because I never take it."

"That is precisely why I shan't give it."

Lesley felt that he ought to say something about hoping that they should meet before long, but he did not, and she was so hurt by the omission that she said coldly, "I suppose I am not a very hopeful person to advise, I am so self-reliant."

"You are the most cheerfully and maddeningly self-reliant young woman I ever came across."

Lesley wondered if he had forgotten the other afternoon when she shed tears at the remembrance of her aunt. There was a little catch in her throat now. She wanted to beg him to write to her. He might find as much fault with her as he liked if he would only write. She could not bear to lose him out of her life. But it was not her place to make advances. She was hurt and humiliated to find that she cared so much for the friendship of a man who looked upon her merely as an attractive girl with whom he could amuse himself when he had nothing better to do. The conditions were so perfect for the ideal friendship of which she had always dreamed. His being so much older than she, and so handicapped that it would be impossible for either of them to have a warmer feeling for the other, would make the continuation of their acquaintance as safe as it would be pleasant. A few letters would take very little of his time, and they would mean so much to her.

"You promised to play to me to-night, Miss Chilton," he reminded her.

"Did I? Then I will. I try to keep my promises."

It was a comfort to sit down to the piano, for she could control her hands. No schoolgirl practicing for an unwelcome music lesson could have played the Chopin nocturnes, which were Mr. Northbrook's choice, in a more perfunctory way. Every bar removed her farther and farther from the softened Lesley Chilton of the other afternoon. If she had been so foolish as to imagine she had made a true friend, she at least had sufficient self-control to hide her disappointment.

"Thank you," Mr. Northbrook said, when she stopped playing. They seemed suddenly to have grown very far apart.

"I ought to be going now," he said, as the hall clock struck ten.

He rose and stood irresolutely for a minute, letting his eyes travel around the room, as if he wanted to fix it in his memory. Finally his glance came back to Lesley, standing by the piano in her white gown.

"I must tell you before I go how much you have done to make my summer pleasant," he said.

"I made it pleasant for myself," she answered, in conventionally cheerful tones.

"Remember," he added, as he shook hands with her, "that you are to let me know whenever you take to the platform. I shall be sure to be there."

"If I don't see you until then, I am afraid you will find me a 'cranky old maid in the forties.' "

"I shall read your article over again, and put your personality behind it," he assured her.

"Do write and tell me what you think of it," she wanted to say, but her pride forbade. "I hope you will have a pleasant journey," was what she did say.

One morning a few days later Charlotte Northbrook came over and interrupted Lesley in her practicing. There was something peculiarly winning about this little girl, who had the enjoyment in life that her elder sister lacked, joined to the frank despair of childhood when things went wrong. "Miss Ward is just horrid," she confided to Lesley.

"Now, my dear, you know you don't think so. Miss Ward is one of the best people in the world."

"I guess I like them better when they are worser," said the child. "I like you. I wish you could have come to live with us instead of Miss Ward. I told father so."

"Did you," said Lesley dryly.

"And he said" —

"Never mind what he said, Charlotte."

"But I want to tell you, it was so strange. He said if you were in the house, it would be like having fireworks and the theatre all the time. I said I thought it would be lovely to have fireworks and the theatre all the time, but father said he

should get tired. It is n't a bit like the theatre having Miss Ward. I have to sit up straight at table and make my spoon go backwards when I eat my soup. Father does n't care how I eat my soup. Do you make your spoon go backwards when you eat your soup, Miss Lesley?"

"Always, it is the proper way."

"I don't always think Miss Ward is horrid," Charlotte was truthful enough to add, — "only when she makes me mind. Father does n't make me mind, he just says, 'Charlotte, you've been talking long enough; I want to talk awhile myself now,' and I stop because I want to hear what father has to say. Father is the interestingest person in the family, except Hal, when he does n't tease. Hal knows more about bugs and birds than father does. You've seen his lovely bird book, have n't you? Hal gave me two beetles the other day, real pretty ones. Father says I must n't say 'real pretty,' but they were. I take them to bed with me every night in a box with holes in the cover, because they are alive and I like them. I am not so lonely, now father has gone, if I have them. Of course the beetles don't take his place, but they are better than nothing."

And so Mr. Northbrook had compared her to fireworks and the theatre, and she had tired him! Nothing else was needed to complete Lesley's sense of humiliation. She remembered how she longed in the old days to meet her superiors, and felt that her easy popularity was not good for her.

Dear Renton! She had never half appreciated the kindness of her friends!

Lesley was not given to introspection, but after Charlotte left her she took a brief survey of the past month, and asked herself why she had tired Mr. Northbrook. She decided that she had been too opinionated. There was none of that repose about her that Mrs. Winship and Marian Northbrook had in such a marked degree. Lesley supposed, too, that she was provincial. Yes, she could imagine seeming crude to a man of Mr. Northbrook's fastidious taste. Well, she could not make herself over, and faulty as she was there were plenty of people who liked her. She glanced at her vivacious face in the glass, and something in the expression of her eyes held her. "I wonder if he would have liked me better if he had suspected what a fool I am inside," she thought.

XVI

MARTHA

LESLEY did not spend the next winter in Boston as she planned, for she had not yet recovered her old elasticity, and was not in spirits for the excitement of city life. Instead of missing her aunt less as time went on, she missed her more. Lesley was still eager to do, some definite work in the world, but no nearer to deciding what it should be, and meanwhile she settled down in Renton, wrapped about by the comfortable eiderdown quilt of appreciation. Every one was so glad to see her that her old confidence began to come back.

The Washburns had hired Lesley's house, as they needed more room, and Amy proposed that Lesley should make her headquarters with them. Amy told her that she could have the upstairs sitting-room that used to be her aunt's for her own parlor, where she could keep her piano, and that she could be free to go off on visits whenever she liked. Lesley replied that she did not believe in any third person living with a newly married pair, whereupon Amy kissed her and said, "in this case there is Paul to make a third; you will make a quartette."

Six months before Lesley would have refused, but she was very lonely and a little tired of the

freedom of living her own life, so she acceded to Amy's proposition gratefully, for she longed for her society. The doctor and Paul were undoubted drawbacks, but Lesley was in a mood to put up with them.

Lesley was not a person easily to efface herself, but she had such a horror of interfering with other people's rights, that she was always present when she was wanted, and absent when she was not wanted. It was not so easy for Martha to change her habits. At first she stoutly refused to live with another maid.

"I, that have always had the kitchen to myself, Miss Lesley, to have to consider the comfort of an Irish girl who eats fish on Friday."

"But Martha, you know you have always said Miss Amy was the loveliest person in the world."

"I said Miss Amy was. Mrs. Washburn is another matter. Take the sweetest woman on God's earth, and when you put her in harness with a man and a cantankerous child and an Irish girl she can't help changing some. I don't mean she ain't just as pleasant, but she's more set. She's got to have things to suit the man and the child and the Irish girl."

"But Martha, if you don't go to Mrs. Washburn, what shall I do? I can't get along without you. Have I got to hire another house?" Lesley asked plaintively.

"I guess you can get along all right without me, Miss Lesley."

"No, I can't. I expect to have you live with me always. If you have the management of things and the Irish girl is under you, I don't believe there will be any trouble. She seems very good-natured."

"She'll want the table set regular for every meal. And I have been accustomed to eat on the fly every Wednesday and Sunday evening."

"Make her set the table. I'm sure you'll get along all right. She is the one who'll have to stand around."

"She's only a young thing, barely twenty-eight," Martha said, with disapproval, "and I know she'll have heedless ways, and she's got a beau. I saw her out walking with him Sunday night. If she thinks she's going to have a beau trapesing round my kitchen, evenings, she's mistaken. The kitchen hasn't ever been used to gentleman callers."

At this point Amy came in, and told Martha how much she wanted to have her live with them. "I should feel perfectly certain the doctor would have good meals with you, Martha, you know what a difference good food makes to a hard-working man. I shall let Katie go, anyway; she is so uncertain, I've had to do a great deal of the cooking myself."

"Bless your dear heart, Miss Amy, I mean Mrs. Washburn, that does seem too bad."

"Nora has taken a great liking to you, Martha," Amy continued, "she hopes you are coming to us."

Martha was at last persuaded to take the position, and the deficiencies of the Irish girl gave a new interest to her life. Martha had always liked power, but she found that the power of reigning supreme is nothing compared to the subtler joy of reigning with a vice-regent whose duty it is to do one's bidding. Nora was sweet-tempered, affectionate, pleasure-loving, and somewhat careless, and it was the chief excitement of Martha's life to go around after her, criticising her work, and keeping her up to the mark. Nora, fortunately for herself, shed scoldings as easily as a duck's back sheds water. Nora and her beaux, for she had more than one, was the theme with which Martha regaled her acquaintances, while Lesley at present was giving her no trouble. Martha rejoiced that her young mistress's acquaintance with Mr. Northbrook seemed to have ended with the summer.

"I suppose Miss Lesley will have to marry somebody some day," Martha informed Mrs. Washburn, one evening, in a burst of confidence. Amy had gone out into the kitchen to give orders for the next day's meals, and she and Martha were bending their heads over a cook-book.

"What in time Miss Lesley would do if she had to settle down and stick to one person steady, I don't know," said Martha. "She ain't like you; she's one that likes to gad considerable. Scaloped lobster, — here it is, Miss Amy, I mean Mrs. Washburn. When a girl has men swarming

round her like bees," Martha added presently, "she generally gets pestered into marrying somebody. I only hope and pray it will be somebody suitable. I declare, I'd be almost ready to have her put up with Nathan Hart, right off now; he ain't exciting, but he's good as gold. I'm so afraid she'll get interested in some one who ain't suitable. She was very much taken with Mr. Northbrook in the summer."

"He is old enough to be her father," Amy remonstrated. "Marian is much more her friend than he is. I am sure there is not a particle of sentiment about their friendship."

"Well, all I can say is," said Martha, "I never saw her so gay and lively with any one else. She was just as different nights he come round. She spirited up same as a horse does when it gets a good driver, and after he left Mt. Desert, my! wan't she down-hearted! She took to missing her aunt. I've no doubt she did. We generally do miss folks when things go kind o' hard. All I can say is she didn't seem to miss her aunt so much when Mr. Northbrook was round."

"Of course not; her mind was taken up then. We've had baked apples so much for tea lately, Martha, I think we'll have apple sauce to-morrow night for a change. The doctor says the greenings are decaying very fast and must be eaten up."

"If the doctor would only let me throw away the bad ones and start in with the good, why then we'd have good apples all winter," Martha said in

an aggrieved tone, "but as it is we'll be eating specked ones all the time, for just as soon as we get one batch ate up, another set begins to spoil. However, the apples ain't mine," she added. "If the doctor prefers three-cornered ones he can have them. I only hope and pray Miss Lesley won't ever run across him again, — Mr. Northbrook, I mean," Martha went on presently. "So far as I know they have n't written to each other. Miss Lesley ain't one to do things on the sly. He just stirs her up. She can't get him out of her mind when he's round, and naturally she don't want to marry a man with four children, so there you are. It's upsetting to the mind. Men are mostly upsetting to the mind, Miss Amy. It is well to give them a wide berth, if you've got any important business in life. It is the women who have n't any men friends who get on. Speaking of apples, do you suppose there would have been any trouble if two women had lived together in the Garden of Eden? Not a bit of it! Eve would have tempted the other woman to eat the apple, and the other woman would have given Eve a piece of her mind, and said, 'It was wrong of you to eat the apple, and I'm sorry you did, but that ain't any reason why I've got to do wrong too. I'll explain about it to the Lord, and take your part, and I guess he'll let us stay on in the garden.' But suppose the other woman had been weak enough to eat the apple, do you think she would be so mean as to put the blame all on Eve? No indeed! She

would n't have said, 'The woman tempted me and I did eat ;' she'd have said, 'It is too much for poor human nature to have such apple trees round, so handy. We were hungry, and we've had a good square meal, and now we are ready to take the consequences.' "

"Martha," said Amy with a laugh, "all men are not like Adam. My husband would have said, 'It is all my fault. I ought to have prevented her from eating the apple, because I am wiser than she and stronger.' "

"Who says they are wiser?" Martha demanded, waving the cook-book in the air, and bringing it down on the table with emphasis. "They are stronger, and that makes them think they are wiser, but they are really a helpless lot. If all the women were to decide to go off to an island and leave the men, the women would get on all right, they've brains enough to fix things somehow, but the men, poor creatures, I pity them if they were left to themselves. How their houses would look! Bare, or else all in a mess."

"There are men decorators and men dress-makers," Amy suggested. "I thought you did n't believe in woman suffrage, Martha. Who would make the laws on your island?"

"We should n't need any. The women would n't break the laws if it was n't for the men."

"You are pretty good to Dr. Washburn, Martha, considering your opinion of men."

"It ain't his fault he's a man, poor thing. He

tries to do as well as he can. Mr. Northbrook is a pretty fair sort, too, as men go. Only he ought n't to come buzzing round a girl like Miss Lesley. He's had his chance. He'd ought to leave a girl like Miss Lesley alone."

"I don't believe he is any more in love with her than you or I are, Martha."

"Well, he'd ought to be, if he ain't. He'd ought to know enough at his age to see he can't come fooling round any time he likes, without folks'll talk. When I think of how 't was me brought them together in the first place, I feel as if I could just whack myself."

"You, Martha? What do you mean?"

"Yes, 't was me. She had her mind set on coming back by boat, and I knew she'd got to change at Rockland, at some outlandish hour. Well, I saw him, a quiet-appearing, light-complected man, walking along with his grown-up daughter, and she stopped just as pretty, — it was near the clothes-line; you remember, Miss Amy, where the wood path begins; I was hanging out the spare-room quilt at the time. 'Father,' says she, 'this is Miss Lesley's friend Martha.' And what did he do but put out his hand just as cordial as if I was the Queen of England, and shake mine, clothes-pin and all. 'I am so glad to see you, Martha,' said he; of course it was just his way of talking, but it kind o' took me in at the time. 'I've heard a great deal about you from my children,' he says. . Well, then and there it come to

me how providential it was, him going off, and coming back about the time she was coming, and I asked him if he was going to take the boat back, and he said he was, so we fixed it, that he should come when she did and look after her. I thought that he'd be useful to carry her bag, and that it would be handy to have him round in case of an accident. I didn't mean he was to keep on looking after her all summer. How could I know that a quiet, middle-aged man with four children wouldn't have anything better to do than hang round her?"

"I think such friendships between men and women are delightful, Martha, and I am sure this is one of the cases where no harm will be done on either side."

"Well, it's stopped for the present," said Martha, "and she is so set against widowers, perhaps I have n't any reason to worry."

And indeed Mr. Northbrook had quite vanished from Lesley's world. Marian almost never mentioned her father when she wrote, and the references to him in Miss Emma Ward's correspondence with her mother were hardly more frequent. Mrs. Ward was always eager to share her daughter's letters with her friends, and she was sure to have a new specimen with which to regale Lesley whenever they met.

"I've had a letter from Emma," Mrs. Ward said one afternoon. "Would you like to hear it, Lesley?"

"Very much."

"Then bring me my spectacles, there's a good girl. I can't read with these glasses. They are on the table, no, the marble-topped one. I said the marble-topped table," she repeated with some asperity. "If I could only get out of this chair I would find things in half a jiffy."

"But they are not on the marble-topped table, Mrs. Ward."

"Look on the bureau, then. Well, I suppose I shall have to try to read with these glasses. Oh, you've found them! — where were they?"

"On the large table, under the halma-board."

"That is just like Cynthia Ward. I often wish I could shake her and Emma up together. Emma's slow, but sure, and Cynthia's quick, and scatter-brained. Well, I suppose you'd like to hear the letter. Emma has been waked up. Florence Hallett has taken her clothes in hand. Florence always was masterful, but I never thought she could get Emma to care for dress. Listen to this: 'I hope, mother, that you won't disapprove of my spending so much money on a tailor-made suit. The price seems large to me, but Florence assures me it is nothing for New York. It is dark blue, and said to be becoming.' Emma never cared whether anything was becoming before, and she has taken to wearing rimless eyeglasses, instead of spectacles, and Florence has made her do her hair high. She has had her photograph taken. It is over there on the mantelpiece."

Lesley looked at the photograph with interest. She had always known that Emma was not plain, but had not realized what a difference dress would make in her. Emma was not beautiful now, but she had the air of a conventional woman in good society, with a face and figure that would pass unnoticed in any company.

"She's almost stylish," Mrs. Ward said. "If any woman had told me four months ago that my Emma would be almost stylish I'd have said she lied."

"I could never look so immaculate as that if I wore tailor-made clothes all my life," Lesley said with a little sigh.

"Immaculate, that is just it. Emma always was as neat as a newly done up dimity curtain. There is never a hair out of place on Emma, and of course now she's undertaken to dress in fashion she does it thoroughly. You have individuality."

"I often wish I had n't. I think it would be so comfortable to look like a chair in a set."

"Emma writes that Florence is expecting you to make her a visit in February or March," Mrs. Ward said, glancing through the letter.

"Is she? How delightful. This is the first I have heard of it."

"Emma says Florence has a charming apartment, and that she and Frank seem very happy." Mrs. Ward paused. "Now I should have supposed that the man who wanted you would n't have been contented with Florence," she proceeded.

"But I declare! it does sometimes seem as if a certain kind of man could n't see any more difference in women than in the men on a halma-board. One is as good as another so long as she is pretty, and makes him comfortable."

"I think the truth of it is that Florence suits Frank precisely," said Lesley, "and that he only liked me best for a time because he knew me first."

"Well, you are not vain, Lesley Chilton; I'll say that for you."

"Life is pretty sure to knock our vanity out of us."

When the invitation came from Mrs. Hallett, Martha had various reasons for Lesley's not accepting it. There was a certain flimsiness about them all, for she did not dare to give the true one. It was impossible for her to say boldly, "I hope you won't go to New York, for I don't think it is wise for you to see anything more of Mr. Northbrook," so she disparaged Lesley's wardrobe, and said her clothes were too old-fashioned to satisfy the critical Mrs. Hallett.

"Well, it is fortunate that I am the one who has to wear them," Lesley returned serenely.

"If it was me, Miss Lesley, I should n't feel it was right to stop the Madison children's music lessons."

"Perhaps you would n't, but as it is I, I do. I am giving the lessons for nothing, and with the express understanding that I may go off for a time."

"Then there is the Suffrage Club," said Martha, as a last resort. "I should n't think you'd feel you'd want to miss that."

"The Suffrage Club! Martha Gibson! What are you at? You may as well say straight out whatever is in your mind. The Suffrage Club! I have it very much at heart, of course, but do you think I can't give up two meetings, for the delights of New York? Come, Martha, if you have any sensible reason for my staying at home, please give it."

"Well, I suppose the truth is I am selfish, Miss Lesley, and I want to keep you at home, for I expect to miss you so."

"Oh, is that it? — what a dear you are!" and Lesley impulsively flung her arms about the old servant. "It is good to have somebody left who cares so much about me."

XVII

MRS. HALLETT'S DINNER

MRS. HALLETT was to give Lesley a dinner, and the guests were to be the Peter Wards, Mr. Northbrook and his daughter, and Miss Emma Ward. Lesley had been in New York a week, and Mr. Northbrook had not yet come to see her. She felt so hurt by this proof of his indifference, that when Florence told her she should seat her between Mr. Hallett and Mr. Northbrook, at table, she said quickly, "Please don't put me next Mr. Northbrook, if you have any pity on me; we always quarrel. I should much rather have Marian on my right."

"I can't give you Marian. You'll have to take Emma Ward, if you don't want Mr. Northbrook. I must have Mr. Ward on my right, whatever happens. He is very sensitive about his place at table, and I can't put his sister next him."

Florence Hallett belonged to that large class of women whose life is chiefly one of details. As she had a cheerful disposition, and no aspirations, she filled her niche in the world with entire satisfaction to herself, and if her limited nature kept her from forming the closest friendships, it also prevented her recognizing the fact. She considered Lesley her most intimate friend, and had never discovered

that she only touched the surface of Lesley's life. Florence's light hair and gray eyes, and somewhat pronounced chin gave her an odd resemblance to her tall brother Nathan, in spite of the fact that she was small and pretty, and was always dressed in the height of the fashion.

On the evening of the dinner, sheets of rain beat against the windows, and the streets were flooded. Mrs. Hallett's usual equanimity was somewhat disturbed.

"It is almost time they were here," she said, glancing at the clock. "Would n't it be provoking if the storm kept them all from coming?"

"I should rather like that," said her husband cheerfully. "We could have such a cosy evening by ourselves."

Mr. Hallett was a plain, blond little man with an unassuming personality. He had been in love with Lesley in her junior year at college, and when she refused him, had consoled himself by transferring his affections to her more encouraging classmate. Lesley had a warm regard for Frank Hallett, and if she wondered why Florence had ever fallen in love with him, she kept this subject of conjecture to herself.

The Peter Wards arrived on the stroke of the hour. It was Mrs. Ward's nature to be late for everything, and her husband's to be ahead of time. There resulted a weary conjugal duel, that was always renewed whenever they went anywhere together. If Mrs. Ward's temper had not been so

serene, life would have been a series of minor annoyances to her, and if Mr. Ward had not been so determined, he would have long since given up the battle for punctuality. As it was, he generally won. Mrs. Ward's stout figure was enveloped in an evening gown of black net, cut low, and it was extremely becoming to her, as she had a pretty neck.

"Your clock is five minutes slow," Mr. Ward informed his cousin, after a time. "The Northbrooks are very late."

"Mr. Northbrook is generally prompt," said Mrs. Hallett, "I suppose the rain has detained them."

"Northbrook ought to allow enough time for such chances," he returned, as gravely as if the matter were of national import.

Mr. Ward was in faultless evening dress, and his pointed brown beard was trimmed to a hair. He looked to Lesley like a man who had been a little ahead of time for more than forty years, and had "arrived" in a worldly sense. He seemed the visible definition of success. In the abstract Lesley liked successful people, and yet now she thought what a singularly uninteresting thing life must be, judged by his standards. She wondered why he had ever been attracted to his easy-going, placid wife. Then the door opened, and in walked the Northbrooks.

Miss Emma Ward came forward first. She too wore a black net gown, and it was opened

a little at her throat. It fitted her exquisitely, and made her somewhat angular figure merely seem fashionably slender. Her hair was pompadoured, and that and the rimless eyeglasses gave her a look of distinction. Lesley saw Miss Emma's brother glance at her with approval. She was a sister of whom any right-minded, conventional brother might be proud. Then Lesley let her eyes wander to Marian. The young girl was in white, and her light hair had been disarranged a little by the wind. She looked like some shy wild-flower that had unexpectedly found the way into a city drawing-room. Marian answered her hostess's greeting in an apologetic fashion.

"I am so sorry to be late. It is all my fault," she explained hurriedly. "Miss Ward and father had to wait for me. Oh, Miss Lesley, how glad I am to see you!" and her face lighted up.

Lesley next looked at Mr. Northbrook. The stamp of visible success was not on him. Indeed she wondered if he would ever "arrive," but what a breath of fresh air seemed to come into the room with him! Lesley had a sudden longing for the summer and the sea.

He sat down by her side at once. "How long have you been here, Miss Chilton?" he asked.

"A week, yesterday."

"And you think it was a cordial way to treat an old friend to be in New York a week without sending him word you were here?"

"I thought you knew I was here."

"I knew in a roundabout way you were coming some time, but I did not know until I received Mrs. Hallett's invitation that you had come."

Lesley did not remind him that four days had elapsed since the invitation had reached him. And at this moment Mr. Hallett came to take her out to dinner.

According to Mrs. Hallett's standards, that dinner was a notable success. Her table had never looked prettier, and it was quite marvelous how well the flowers and candy matched the pink shades of her candelabra and her own gown. The cook, too, had quite outdone herself, and both Mr. Ward and Mr. Northbrook were most agreeable. To Lesley the occasion would have been more satisfactory if she and her host had not already had many chances for conversation, and if her right-hand neighbor had been more responsive. Miss Emma could attain distinction in appearance, but not in conversation, and feeling this she had the wisdom to say little.

When the men joined them in the drawing-room after dinner, Mr. Ward came straight to Lesley, with his usual promptness, and took the place she had been destining for Mr. Northbrook. Lesley was tried, out of all proportion to the cause. Nevertheless, she exerted herself to please Mr. Ward. After a time Mrs. Hallett drew the Wards away, to show them some photographs of Mt. Desert, and Mr. Northbrook slipped into Mr. Ward's chair.

"I remember, Miss Chilton," he began, "that you once told me I must make a bee line for the right woman."

"Did I? Oh, I remember, and you said there were usually six right women present."

"They are not here to-night," he assured her, with imperturbable gravity. "How much longer are you going to be in New York?"

"A week longer."

"Is that all? And I have lost a whole week."

"But I have n't. I have been sight-seeing most assiduously. I have seen the new Court House, and the Metropolitan Museum, and St. George's Church, and Chinatown. Have n't I had a varied and liberal education? And that is n't half that I have done."

"It is delightful to see you again. All the way down here I kept thinking of that rainy night last summer when you played to me."

"I would play to you now, but I am afraid every one else would rather talk."

"I don't want you to play now. There is so little time I don't want to waste any of it."

"What a perfectly delightful compliment to my music."

"You should have said what a perfectly delightful compliment to yourself, for you know how much I like your music."

They both laughed, and Lesley had a feeling of utter frivolity and content.

"I can almost imagine it is last summer when I

hear the rain on the windows and see you in a black evening gown," he said. "How I wish it were last summer, and that we were on the City of Bangor, just starting on our voyage together, with the summer ahead of us and nothing behind."

"Do you mind having things behind?" she inquired in surprise. "I like a past. One is so secure. It is like a concrete thing, a picture or a jewel. One owns one's past. It is complete, finished. Life is such a shifting drama that one may never see an acquaintance again; so the future is uncertain. It is everything to have a well-proportioned and well-rounded past."

"And you call it well-proportioned and well-rounded?" he asked rapidly. "A flash of sunshine, a strain of music? This is your idea of a symmetrical and satisfactory past?"

Lesley felt her heart beat quicker, and she had to remind herself that Mr. Northbrook had let six months pass without making any effort to see her or hear from her.

"I like things in flashes," she answered. "One gets tired if one has too much. It is like the theatre and fireworks, — one does not care for them every day."

She made a significant pause, but it was evident that the quotation was lost upon him. "What have you been doing all this long time?" she asked.

"Working. And you?"

"I have been having a delightful time in Ren-

ton. I have n't had a bit of criticism since I left Mt. Desert. Don't you think I have improved wonderfully under the softening influence of approbation?" and she glanced up at him from under her dark eyelashes with a touch of coquetry that was unusual with her.

He looked at her for a minute without speaking, and once more her heart beat faster. "You need n't answer that question," she told him, "I can assure you that I have improved, even if you can't see it. I am growing wiser every day."

"Are you? I wish I were."

"One is a great deal wiser when one is under thirty," Lesley said lightly. "If I want good practical advice I always go for it to my contemporaries. After thirty, one is hampered by one's traditions."

At the end of a delightful half hour Lesley became aware that every one else was either talking rapidly, like Florence Hallett, to unsympathetic ears, or else struggling to find something to say.

"I have talked to you enough," she said in an undertone, "I am longing to see Marian. I am going to take my own advice and make a bee line for the right woman."

Mr. Northbrook's expostulations were in vain; Lesley left him and joined his daughter, to whom their host was talking in his gentle, well-bred way.

Mr. Hallett's sympathies were always, conversationally speaking, with the under dog, and consequently he never enjoyed company at his own

house in the same way that his wife did, who assumed that if the hostess was amused it followed that her guests enjoyed themselves. Mr. Hallett was always loved by shy people and adored by bores. He had been doing his duty by Mrs. Ward and Miss Emma, and was now trying to break through Marian's shyness. He was charmed by her lovely face, but so far had only succeeded in extracting monosyllables from her.

"I thought I was never going to have a chance to see you," Lesley said, taking both of Marian's hands in hers. "Don't go off, Frank, we haven't any secrets."

She was determined to prove that her good spirits had nothing to do with Mr. Northbrook, so she exerted herself to her utmost and had never been more lively and fascinating. Gradually one person after another stopped talking to listen to her. Mr. Ward melted away imperceptibly from his hostess and stood on the edge of their group, and Miss Emma strained her ears to catch the point of Lesley's stories, and answered Mrs. Hallett at random. Mr. Northbrook alone seemed unimpressed, and gave his whole attention to Mrs. Ward.

As the guests were leaving, Mr. Northbrook said to Lesley, "I have a beautiful edition of the *Rubáiyát* that I want to show you. I have an engagement in this part of the town to-morrow, and if you are to be at home, and I can get time to come, I will look in on you about five o'clock."

"I shall be very glad to see you," she said.

Lesley could not bring herself to tell Florence that Mr. Northbrook might come to see her the next day. Mrs. Hallett had a hospital meeting that took her out for the early part of the afternoon, so Lesley was left to her own devices. She found herself looking forward to five o'clock with such eagerness that she took herself to task. It was absurd to stay in the house the whole of such a beautiful afternoon on the chance of a man's coming to see her, who had distinctly said that he might not get time for it. She decided to go for a walk and not to hurry back.

Lesley turned her steps towards the park. All the time, although she tried to think of other things, there was an undercurrent of excitement in her mind. Her feet had wings; weariness, unhappiness, and the sense that life was often tragic and oftener dull, had gone. It was a joy to be alive. It was a joy to feel the wind in her face, to see the groups of happy children in the park. What a good place the world was to live in after all!

Mr. Northbrook was her friend, in spite of the fact that he might forget her for months. "It is like 'a flash of sunlight, a strain of music,'" as he said, she thought. "But I want it to stop where it is." Lesley was glad that she should never see a great deal of Mr. Northbrook; for she liked best to keep him in the background of her thoughts, a sure refuge when life was dull or sad.

She took out her watch at intervals, to time herself so that she should be a little late, and prove to him that she did not greatly care whether he came or not. Once, when she thought she was walking too fast, she sat down on a bench. Some children passing with their nurse, looked at her with approbation.

"See," said one of them, a pretty mite in a brown fur-trimmed coat and beaver bonnet, "the lady is n't cold, — she is sitting down; why can't we?"

They passed her, and the wind took away the maid's answer.

It was cold on the bench, even for Lesley, so she walked along at a snail's pace for a time, trying to fix her mind on the passers-by. At last she felt for her watch again. It was gone. The black ribbon on which it hung had given way. The watch was one of her dearest possessions, for it had been a present from her aunt Irene, so there was nothing to do but go back at once and look for it. She turned with bitterness in her heart, for this delay would probably make her lose Mr. Northbrook's call. She hurried along with her eyes fixed on the ground, and both the watch and Mr. Northbrook's visit grew more and more inexpressibly desirable as her chance for losing them increased.

Lesley had retraced her steps for nearly a mile, and her quest had been in vain, when she came to the bench where she had been sitting, and noticed

something yellow lying near it. She ran forward, and her familiar monogram caught her eye. She could hardly have felt more pleasure in finding a long lost friend. . There was not even a dent in the gold, thanks to its having fallen face downward, but the crystal was smashed and the watch had stopped. She tied it firmly on her black watch-guard, and walked home in an incredibly short time. She arrived at the house glowing and breathless.

"Has Mrs. Hallett come back?" she asked the janitress carelessly.

"Yes 'm, and there's a gentleman there, who asked for you both."

So he had waited for her!

Lesley paused for a minute to recover her breath before going up the long flight of stairs that led to her friends' apartment.

"I am sorry to be late," she said, as she pushed open the parlor door.

"You have missed a call from Mr. Northbrook," said Florence. "He waited as long as he could, but he had another engagement."

"What time did he get here?"

"He must have been here a little before five, for he was here when I came back from the hospital meeting. He seemed distinctly put out when I came in, for he thought it was you. It was all he could do to be polite to me. I never saw him come so near being cross."

"What did he say?"

"It was n't what he said, it was his manner. I told him you would be very sorry to miss him, that you would have been sure to be here if you had known he was coming. By the way, I did n't tell you that last night he invited us all to take Sunday dinner with him to-morrow, but I knew you would n't want to go, as you say you and he don't get on, and it is so far off, and the children are always there on Sunday, and round under your feet the whole time, so I told him we had another engagement. You look tired, Lesley; I am afraid you have been walking too far."

"I am a little out of breath," said Lesley. She took up Mr. Northbrook's card and started for her own room.

"Come back as soon as you can, dear," Florence called after her. "I can't bear to lose a moment of you, and I want to tell you about the hospital meeting, it was as amusing as a farce."

Lesley was very cold and tired. She was enraged with herself for feeling as if all the happiness had gone out of her visit. She looked intently at Mr. Northbrook's card. "You are a perfect idiot," she said. "What difference does it make to you whether you lose his call or not?" And tearing his card in two she flung it into the waste-paper basket.

XVIII

THE WINTER SEA

LESLEY had gone to Atlantic City to spend a few days with the Winships. The invitation came the Monday after her unlucky walk in the park. At first Florence refused, point blank, to let her go, but she finally withdrew her opposition when Lesley promised to come back to her.

It was delightful to see Mrs. Winship again. Lesley felt at once as if she were breathing her native air. She was fond of Florence, but she could not be herself with her, and after a week of her society she had a cramped feeling.

"Henry is having his afternoon constitutional," Mrs. Winship said, as she showed Lesley to her room at the hotel the day of her arrival. "He is looking forward with great pleasure to your visit."

"Is your brother here?"

"No. My husband's name is Henry, too. My husband is having his constitutional in a wheelchair, poor man. I am hoping my brother and Marian will come down Friday to stay over Sunday, but he is n't sure he can get off."

When Lesley first met Mr. Winship she was struck by the beauty and refinement of his face. He was a little past sixty, with iron-gray hair and regular features. Indeed, she had seldom seen so

ideally handsome a man. To add to her interest in him his countenance was tinged with a slight melancholy. He had the look of patient adjustment to untoward circumstances that could not fail to remind one that he was a chronic invalid.

"Do you play whist, Miss Chilton?" was one of his first questions. He had an unusually fine voice, and spoke in a measured way that gave dignity to his lightest words.

"No, not what good players call whist. I have only played a few games in my life, but I should like to learn, if you don't mind teaching me," she added with the cheerful confidence of youth.

Mr. Winship flung his hands out in a deprecating manner.

"My dear young lady, it takes years to learn to play whist. My wife has played nearly every evening for the last four years, and she is n't a scientific player yet."

"If you want to play to-night, don't mind me. I shall be perfectly happy watching the people, or I can go out and take a walk in the moonlight."

"Alone? oh, no, my dear Miss Chilton, we could n't allow that. We will give up whist for to-night," he said, with heroic fortitude.

"Henry is never quite happy without his whist in the evening," Mrs. Winship explained. "It is one of his few enjoyments."

"I am, as you see, Miss Chilton, a broken man," Mr. Winship remarked. "I have had to give up leading the strenuous life."

"I am very sorry," Lesley said sympathetically, wondering if his wife and her visitor would be obliged to forego the strenuous life also.

"Henry is always so patient," Mrs. Winship said.

"I can play backgammon and halma and cribbage," Lesley confided to her host in an unguarded moment, touched by his feebleness.

His eyes brightened. "We will have some games of halma instead of whist to-night. Madeline has played halma with me until she has grown a little weary of it. We have had a tournament. We play three games every afternoon after lunch. And out of two hundred games we have come out — how even should you imagine we have come out?"

"I have n't any idea."

"Oblige me by giving a guess, Miss Chilton."

"I fancy you are about six games ahead," said Lesley at a venture.

"You are almost exactly right. Is n't it astonishing, Madeline, that she should have come so near? I am just eight games ahead. After the first hundred games Madeline was four ahead, then I caught up with her and passed her."

"How very close!"

Mr. Winship played halma with Lesley after dinner that evening and this gave his wife a chance to talk to some of her acquaintances. He was as absorbed in the game as if he had been a schoolboy. Lesley felt as if her pathway through life were destined to be strewn with halma-boards.

In an unlucky moment she had taught Paul Washburn how to play, and she had also been inveigled into an occasional game with Mrs. Ward.

"We have breakfast at nine o'clock," Mrs. Winship told her guest as she bade her good-night. "I hope you don't mind a late breakfast. Henry prefers it."

"No, indeed," said Lesley, although she did mind very much, as she was used to a half past seven breakfast. "I shall be a consummate liar before I go back," she thought. Her native air had already become polluted, and Florence Hallett's life represented reckless gayety.

After breakfast Mrs. Winship always read to her husband for an hour. They were halfway through Green's "Short History of the English People." Mr. Winship entreated Lesley to make one of their party, with all the courtly dignity at his command. "You must not feel as if you were intruding, my dear Miss Chilton," he assured her. "There is nothing that Madeline and I enjoy more than a sympathetic addition to our little company."

In pleasant weather, Mr. Winship went out for an hour and a half in a wheel-chair, and he was much happier if his wife accompanied him in a double chair. When they reached the board walk Mr. Winship begged that Lesley would take a wheel-chair, too.

"You will find it a very pleasant form of motion," he informed her. "And you will observe that they are taken by every one, so there is nothing

conspicuous in it. You can go much farther in a wheel-chair. If you prefer to be in a double one with my wife, I will take a single one."

But this sacrifice was not demanded of him. Take a wheel-chair when she had two feet that were simply longing to carry her down to that great stretch of sand where the breakers were rolling in, in disregarded majesty! Take one of those over-grown baby-carriages and be wheeled along the planks as if one were a child who had not learned to walk! Never! Surely courtesy did not demand this! She thanked Mr. Winship, and said she would go down on the beach, and join them later, on their way home.

Oh, how good it was to have a little time to herself! What a slavery marriage was! How could Mrs. Winship endure month after month and year after year of this life? She loved her husband, to be sure, there was no doubt of that. She loved him with a force that was inconceivable to Lesley. "I could never, in my wildest moments," she thought, "dream of caring enough for a man to go through life by his side in a wheel-chair, to the accompaniment of games, enlivened by history."

When Lesley at length came up from the beach to go in search of her friends she felt a victim, like others before her, to the seductions of the board walk. Now it reminded her of a variety show, in the constant shifting of its scenes, and then of the theatre, as she caught some glimpse of tragedy or

comedy. All sorts and conditions of wheel-chairs passed her, hooded, open, double, single, carrying pale invalids, — whose presence gave Lesley a stab at the heart, — holding rosy children, indolent matrons and lazy men. And the procession of those who walked was no less significant. Vice, openly flaunting and unmistakable, jostled pale, sickly virtue in the crowd. Florid men and women, whose mere presence caused Lesley to shrink away and turn her gaze towards the illimitable, restful sea, seemed to be enjoying their evanescent triumph, while the wan invalids, whose saintly faces showed a well-fought battle, had a look of despair, or resignation. It was the world in miniature. When Lesley grew tired of watching the crowd, she turned to look at the shops that bounded the board walk on her left, and being a true woman she speedily became absorbed in the variety of their contents. It was the jewelry that appealed to her the most. Coral and amber beads flashed their splendor upon her at every turn. She wanted a string of each; she could only afford one necklace, and henceforth the lighter moments of her visit were given to the balancing of the respective advantages of the two.

As soon as lunch was over Mr. Winship had his three games of halma, then an hour in the wheel-chair, and after that Mrs. Winship read aloud to him and Lesley. They were in the first volume of "The Antiquary."

"I never tire of Scott," Mr. Winship told his

guest. "He is the great magician. Madeline, is this the fifth or sixth time we have read 'The Antiquary' together?"

At the end of the reading there came a blessed period in which Mr. Winship rested before dinner, and Lesley had her dear Mrs. Winship wholly to herself.

The prospect of the arrival of Mr. Northbrook and Marian was dangerously exciting in contrast to Lesley's enforced quiet, although after the first day she adapted herself to circumstances and began to find a certain satisfaction in her monotonous life. She bought fruit and crackers, and had a supplementary breakfast at half past seven every morning in her own room, and then went out for a solitary walk, before joining the Winships in the dining-room at nine o'clock. Then, too, she liked some of Mrs. Winship's middle-aged acquaintances, who made a variety in the day.

The Northbrooks came towards the end of Friday afternoon, and Mr. Northbrook was as cordial when he greeted Lesley as if she had not failed to be at home the week before. She had the mortification of feeling that she had made a mountain out of a molehill. It was glorious moonlight, and Lesley hoped that she and the Northbrooks might go down on the beach for a walk after dinner; but she reckoned without her host, who was bent upon securing his brother-in-law for some games of whist.

"As you two young ladies have each other, I

am not going to apologize for pinning my wife and her brother down to the whist table," he said. "I can easily get a fourth."

Lesley was vexed to see how readily Mr. Northbrook consented to play. She and Marian sat in the parlor for some time, but it was very hot, and outside were the moonlight and the sea and the crisp air of an unusually mild evening in March.

"Let's go for a walk," Lesley said to Marian.

"I must ask father whether I can go," said Marian.

"He won't mind. It will only interrupt him."

But the conscientious Marian was already crossing the room, a thing which it was a martyrdom for her to do when it was full of people.

"Father says it is all right," she told Lesley, "only we must not go far, and we must not go off the board walk."

They walked up and down on the board walk for some time, but Lesley was longing to go down by the sea. "There is n't any one on the beach," she said. "I am sure your father would not mind your going. I'll take the blame," she added, as Marian hesitated.

"I think I had better go back and ask father."

"That will take too much time. I am going anyway."

Marian haltingly followed Lesley down the flight of steps that led to the beach. "I am afraid father won't like it," she murmured.

"I will tell him it was my fault. Oh, what

moonlight, and what a night! It is summer! Summer on the eastern seacoast, when one turns one's back to the board walk. Think of all those people stifling in there over their whist!"

"Uncle Henry can't come out in the evening, and Aunt Madeline won't leave him; I am sure father would much rather have come, only he did n't want to disappoint Uncle Henry."

"He would n't rather come," said Lesley. "So far as my observation goes, any one who really likes whist prefers it to nature and friendship and family affection."

They had the world of beauty to themselves. The sea came rolling up on the beach in wave after wave of foam that broke white in the moonlight. The air was salt and gave them a delicious feeling of exhilaration. Marian was not so warmly dressed as Lesley, who drew the girl under the shelter of her golf cape. As she did so Marian gave her a breathless kiss.

"You dear person!" she cried. "It seems too good to be true that I have you all to myself."

"You dear child, it is delightful to see you again."

"You do care a little about me?" Marian asked. "I know you can't care so much as I do. You have so many friends, father says I must n't expect it. There is n't anybody, except the family, there never has been anybody I have cared for as I care for you."

"Love me just as much as you can, dear," and

Lesley pressed Marian's hand. "I need it all. I am a safe person to care about, for I always care back."

"I was so disappointed at the dinner," Marian confessed, "because I didn't have a chance to talk to you, and then when you left father and came across to me all of your own accord, quite of your own dear accord, so you must have wanted to come, I was so happy, and now, to have you all to myself away from everybody, it is almost too much. I hadn't meant to tell you how I felt about you for fear it would bother you, but I couldn't help it, you are so dear."

"I am glad you told me," said Lesley gently. "We will be two good, stanch comrades. You mustn't care about me as if I were a superior person, dear. I am full of faults. But, darling child, the more faults one has, the more one needs love, and when you see me doing things you don't approve of, you must say, 'Lesley needs me to love her, all the more.' And if I ever hurt your feelings, dear, — I am careless sometimes, — or if I do things you don't understand, just tell me, and we will kiss and make up like two children."

"Oh, it is too much," said Marian, "quite too much happiness to be true. I never have been so happy in all my life. First, mother died when I was only ten, and we have had different housekeepers, and some of them I could not love, and some of them I was beginning to love when they went away. There has always been father, he is

the dearest person, but he is a man, and he is very busy, and there are the children, but they are so young. I can talk to you about everything. Last summer you did me so much good talking about college. I hope father will let me go. He is weakening a little. I remember you said once, 'We each have to lead our own life, and self-expression is as important as self-sacrifice.' I told father that you said that."

"What did he say?"

"I don't remember exactly," Marian answered, after a little pause.

"I am afraid it was n't anything very flattering," said Lesley, with a rueful laugh.

"Oh, father likes you very much, but he does n't believe in the way girls are brought up now. And then he feels as if he needed me at home."

"I don't wonder at that," said Lesley. What had so changed her point of view? She remembered the long talks she had had with Marian in the summer when she had tried with all her powers to strengthen the girl in her determination to go to college. That was before she had seen Marian's father. Now, she found herself siding with Mr. Northbrook and had a pang at the prospect of his loneliness without this daughter who was the chief joy of his life. Lesley wondered how Marian could bear to leave him, and yet she felt as strongly as ever the advantages of a college education for a woman, and she was sure that Marian ought to be allowed to choose her own life.

"Dear Miss Lesley, won't you talk to father about my going to college?" Marian begged impulsively. "He would be so much more likely to listen to you."

"I hope for your sake you will be able to go, but it will be pretty hard for your father to give you up."

"Yes, it will be hard for father, but, as you said last summer, he has Charlotte and the boys, and he would not think of keeping Hal and Stephen from college because he would miss them. You don't think it is my duty to stay at home with father?" Marian asked, with beseeching eyes fixed on her oracle. "You have n't changed your mind?"

"No, dear, I have n't changed my mind."

"And you will speak to father?"

"Yes," she promised.

They were so interested in the talk which followed, that they wandered a long way from the hotel. It was Marian who first suggested timidly that perhaps it was time for them to go back.

When they came up the steps to the board walk they saw Mr. Northbrook standing there.

"Do you know how late it is?" he asked. His tone was so quiet that Lesley did not realize the extent of his displeasure.

"No, father, we did not have our watches."

"It is ten o'clock."

"Is that all?" said Lesley.

"Marian ought to have been in bed an hour

ago." He spoke in the same low voice. "I never thought of your going off the board walk when I expressly told you to keep on it," he said, ignoring Lesley and turning to his daughter. "It isn't safe for two girls to be wandering about that lonely beach at this time of night."

Lesley saw now that he was angry. "It is wholly my fault," she hastened to explain. "I thought we should get home while you were playing whist, and could tell you what we had done before you had a chance to worry about us."

"My brother-in-law always goes to bed early," he said, somewhat mollified by her remark. "I have been looking for you for a long time."

"I didn't have my watch," Lesley said, "because it is being mended. Saturday afternoon when I was out, I lost it in the park, and had to go back for it. I found it, but the crystal was smashed."

"Saturday afternoon, did you say?"

"Yes, that is why I was so late. I was so sorry to miss your call."

"I thought you had forgotten I said I would come, for Mrs. Hallett did not seem to expect me."

"I didn't forget. I never forget pleasant things."

They were standing under an electric light where Lesley could watch the effect of her words.

His face cleared instantly. "We shall have time to take a little walk on the beach," he said.

"There is no use in going in so early in such moonlight."

Lesley refrained from reminding him that it was an hour past Marian's bedtime.

The next morning, as Lesley was starting for her customary stroll before breakfast, she was surprised to see Mr. Northbrook in the office reading the morning paper.

"Good luck!" he exclaimed, as he joined her. "Are you going for a walk and may I come too?"

"Of course you may."

"I hoped something like this might happen," he acknowledged as they went out of the door together, "so I got up early and had my breakfast. By the way, have you had anything to eat?"

"Yes. I always have two breakfasts. Don't betray me to the Winships, please. Wouldn't Marian like to come with us?" and she paused in front of the hotel.

"Marian, I regret to say, positively revels in the chance to keep late hours."

"I can't tell you the curious effect this place has on me," said Lesley as they reached the board walk. "The ocean is so big and restful, and yet no one but myself seems to look at it. It is like an accident, a mere excrescence that happens to be here. The one really important thing about Atlantic City is the board walk."

"It is like our own preoccupation with our petty individuality in the face of eternity," he said.

"I don't want to walk on the board walk," said

Lesley, as Mr. Northbrook passed the steps that led down to the beach. "If you are going to walk with me you will have to come down to my ocean."

"All right. I am not so devoted to the board walk that I would rather walk there alone than on the beach with you."

"I am glad," said Lesley, as she began to go down the steps, "for I am so devoted to the beach that I would rather walk on it alone than on the board walk with you."

"I have not the slightest doubt of that."

"You may have to stop and dig wells," she remarked, looking back from the lower step over her shoulder at him.

They went along the beach for a mile in the high spirits of two children, and then, in an unlucky moment, Lesley remembered her promise of the night before.

"Mr. Northbrook," she began, "I am glad to have this chance to see you alone, because I want to say something to you about Marian's going to college next autumn."

His face instantly clouded. "Indeed!" he said, in an icy tone.

"I know it is n't any affair of mine," she went on hurriedly, "and I hate to spoil your holiday by introducing a subject on which we disagree, but" —

He did not help her. He walked along in a moody silence.

"But I feel so strongly," she continued, "that

we all have the right to express our individuality."

"Our important individuality! We each want to make our little choices, and decide whether we shall walk by the ocean or along the board walk."

"Yes. We will call college walking by the sea. I think it the better place to walk, for it gives one the wider horizon. Mr. Northbrook, now I have seen you and Marian together, I know just how hard it would be for you to let her go to college, but — in after years, if she does not go, when she looks back over her life with the regret we all feel when we are denied our cherished wishes, will you not feel regret too? She is so reasonable, and she cares so much for study, and she loves you so that there could be no danger of her getting weaned from you. I know you would be lonely, but would it not be better for her?"

"Miss Chilton, you are asking me home questions. I have been over and over in my mind all the pros and cons. But, apart from my own personal comfort, I honestly do not believe in a college education for a girl like Marian. She is too intense. She would study too hard. The intellectual and emotional sides of her nature will be sufficiently developed in any case, and I do not believe in the hothouse forcing process of a college for her. If it were Charlotte, I should feel differently. I should know she would slide through with very little work. I wish I could make you see the matter from my standpoint and that you

would try to get Marian to give up the idea of going to college. You have great influence with her."

"I have already done all I could to make her want to go," Lesley confessed. "It would not be fair to go back on her. And besides, I do believe in college for a girl like Marian; I believe there is nothing so tranquilizing to an emotional, high-strung girl as the chance to be one of a mass and measure herself with other girls, and it would be everything to her to be able to make friends of her own age."

"We can never agree," said Mr. Northbrook, "and so we may as well change the subject."

Lesley, however, could not forbear to give a few more arguments on her side. After she had said everything she could think of in favor of colleges, they walked on in silence, and Lesley felt she had displeased Mr. Northbrook so much that he would never feel the same to her again.

"Will you forgive me for meddling?" she asked. "Please find fault with me. Do say all the things that are in your mind. I would much rather have people angry outside than inside."

"I am not in the least angry with you," he said coldly.

"But you ought to be," Lesley insisted. "I should be furious, if I were a man and a girl advised me what to do with my own daughter. I should tell her roundly to mind her own business and hold her impertinent tongue."

She glanced up at him brightly, her face glowing with health and her eyes shining with the pure joy of living.

He looked at her for a moment half wistfully. "How very young you are!" he said.

She felt chilled. "I suppose you mean I am too young for you to discuss things seriously with me," she returned. "If I were a man and the age I am you would have it out with me. Do say anything you like. If I am friends with a person they can pitch into me all they please. I enjoy the excitement of the thing."

"But I don't want to pitch into you."

"I wish you did. I wish you weren't quite so polite, and that you would forget I am a girl."

"But that delightful fact is precisely what I don't want to forget. Do you suppose I should enjoy you as much if you were a man of forty?"

"I wish I were a man of forty just for this morning, for then you would pay me the compliment of taking me seriously. You have such an aggravating way of dismissing a subject. It is as if I were Charlotte's age, and you said, 'Come, child, we won't talk about it any more. When you are older you will understand.'"

"You could not have expressed my feelings better. When you are older you will understand many things. You will realize, for instance, that if, by rare luck, we catch a glimpse of the fountain, it is better to enjoy the fleeting vision and not plunge into the desert."

Suddenly Lesley had a curious feeling of comprehension. It was as if, for the moment, she were a middle-aged man walking by the side of a girl who was in the full enjoyment of her youth. She could understand Mr. Northbrook's temporary detachment from his colorless existence when he was with her, and yet realize at the same time that she was as irrelevant to the main purpose of his life as a butterfly is to an oak tree. She felt that she understood him at last. And, after all, why should they not be like two playfellows, good comrades when they were together and ready to forget each other over night? She was willing to play with him on his own terms.

"I am longing to dig a well in the sand," she said, "and watch the tide come in and fill it. There is a stick over there. Please get it for me. Can you make good wells? I am sure you can't make such good ones as I can."

"I can make much better wells," he assured her gravely, as he handed her her chosen implement. "I've had three times the practice. I began to make them long before you were born, and I have made them for all of my children."

"It is n't practice that makes the difference," she told him, "it is natural ability. I have a positive genius for digging."

"In spite of your genius, mine is larger and deeper," he said presently.

"Because you have a lot of superfluous strength. But mine is a much better shape. See how round

it is. I should be ashamed to make anything so irregular as yours."

They lingered by the water until the tide rolled in and filled his man's achievement and her woman's effort impartially.

XIX

A DOUBLE WELCOME

LESLEY was in the train on her way home from New York, on the next Saturday morning, with the past only a happy memory, and the future, as far as her eye could see, an arid stretch of placid Renton life, variegated by suffrage work. The present seemed equally detached from both, and the long journey gave her a quiet time for thought. First she lived over again that Saturday and Sunday at Atlantic City, when, by some subtle alchemy, the life that once had seemed monotonous was touched with poetry. And then she reviewed her crowded days with Florence. When the Northbrooks left her at Mrs. Hallett's door on Monday morning she thought she should see nothing further of Mr. Northbrook, but he called on Tuesday evening to tell her that he was going to Boston Friday afternoon, and to ask if they could not arrange to take the same train. She refused to change her plans, ostensibly, because her economical soul grudged spending the two extra dollars that the Knickerbocker train involved, but really, because, in spite of her advanced theories as to the equality of the sexes, she was too much of a woman to be willing to alter her plans for a man's convenience. She tried to make him change

his and go on the slow morning train Saturday, although, in her heart of hearts she knew she was unreasonable to expect him to postpone an important business engagement, involving other people, for the sake of traveling with her. He came again to see her on Thursday evening, but she missed his call as she and the Halletts were at the theatre with the Peter Wards, but on her return she found a box of sweet peas from him and a characteristic note. She had it with her now in her traveling bag, and when she reached this part of her story she took it out and read it over.

DEAR MISS CHILTON, — I believe it is always summer in fairyland, is it not? Charlotte, whom I have consulted, tells me so, and I do not remember any account of the revels of fairies in frost and snow. I have had a taste of fairyland, and before I leave it I want to send you, as a tangible remembrance, the sweet peas that I picked there. If I could "shatter the world to bits and remould it nearer to my heart's desire," it would be always summer, and you would always be there in the sunshine, and I should be young, and life would have no past but be all future; but even while I write the snow is beating against my windows, and the children are clamoring for a fairy tale, and you are perversely going on the slow train Saturday. There is everything to remind me that my holiday is over.

Sincerely yours,

HENRY BOWEN NORTHBROOK.

Lesley composed various answers to this note as the train sped eastward. Sometimes they were in the same vein as Mr. Northbrook's, friendly and illusive, but oftener they were thoroughly matter-of-fact. "I am perfectly willing to play his game," she thought, "only this time it is I who do not want a correspondence." She was glad she had herself so well in hand that she could enjoy him when they were together and not miss him too much when they were apart.

As the train approached Boston, Lesley remembered that Nathan Hart was there on business and would probably meet her, Florence had said. He got into the train at the Back Bay Station. Lesley did not see him until he was standing close by her, looking down on her with his friendly smile.

"Nathan, how good it is to see you," she said heartily. Here was a simple, restful person, who would never trouble her by writing enigmatical notes. "Florence told me you might meet me, but I was n't at all sure you could take the time, and I never thought of your getting in at the Back Bay Station."

"I guess it'll be a long day before I can't find time to meet you, Lesley," he said, as she moved along in the seat to make room for him.

When they reached the South Terminal, Nathan took possession of her hand-bag and golf cape. "Florence says you are going out to Ashmont, so I thought I might be useful," he said. "I've looked up the Ashmont trains and there is n't one

for twenty-three minutes, so perhaps you would like to come into the waiting-room.

As Lesley was getting out of the car she glanced up at Nathan brightly. "It is so good to see you," she said again. At that moment she noticed vaguely that some one bowed to her, and turning to see who it was, she encountered the sombre gaze of Henry Northbrook. For a moment she thought he must be on his way to take a New York train; then she realized that he had come to meet her.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," she said cordially. "Nathan, this is Mr. Northbrook. Mr. Northbrook, you must have heard me speak of my friend Mr. Hart."

"I have had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Hart."

Although he said pleasure he did not look it. "I thought perhaps I could see you into your Ashmont train, but as you are so well provided for I won't wait."

"Oh, please wait. It is twenty minutes before my train goes."

She walked between her two companions. As they both retreated into their shells, she was obliged to do all the talking. When they went in at the waiting-room door, she was struck by the array of flowers for sale in the pavilion. There were brown jars filled with scarlet carnations and pale pink ones, and mignonette and deep red roses. "How lovely those flowers are!" she exclaimed, "it seems quite like summer," and she glanced up brightly at Mr. Northbrook.

"Winter has come to stay," said Henry Northbrook.

"Well, I don't know about that," said Nathan. "After all, it is March. Of course having snow on the ground makes it seem like winter. We had quite a blizzard in Renton. It is the twenty-fifth snowstorm we've had this year."

"Indeed," said Mr. Northbrook dryly.

Nathan meanwhile had deposited Lesley's bag and golf cape at the end of a seat.

"Middlesex," said Lesley, glancing at the wall opposite; "I like having these names here, they suggest such pleasant things. One thinks at once of the Fells; and there is Nantucket just beyond." She talked on to save the situation. "Look at those hideous wreaths and crosses," she continued, fixing her eyes on the pavilion where they were for sale. There was a yellow cross made of immortelles, with "father" in black letters, and another horror constructed of pink floss with "sister" in purple, and two white immortelle wreaths lettered in black.

"Do you suppose grief can be as real," she asked, "when people use such frightful symbols for their sorrow? It seems as if it cannot be genuine, if one can get comfort out of a thing like that."

"I fancy grief that mourns in bad taste is quite as real as the other kind," said Mr. Northbrook.

He was as frankly out of humor as a boy whose favorite plaything has been taken possession of by another child. Lesley wished she could get rid of

Nathan Hart just long enough to thank Mr. Northbrook for his flowers, for this, she felt sure, would raise his spirits.

"Nathan," she said, "would you mind getting me a time-table of the Ashmont trains? I want to know what train to take back on Monday."

"I have one here. I thought you would want one," and Nathan took it from his pocket. "I have been looking up the trains," and he spread out the yellow time-table between them. "Eight eight, that would be too early for you; eight twenty-two, eight fifty-two, — if you took that you could get the ten o'clock train to Renton; then there is one at nine twenty-two, and after that" —

"I must be going, Miss Chilton," said Mr. Northbrook stiffly.

"I hope you enjoyed your solitary journey," Lesley said. "Mr. Northbrook would n't come on my train," she explained to Nathan plaintively; "he preferred to pay two dollars, so as to escape my society."

"Miss Chilton, how unfair of you!" Mr. Northbrook exclaimed, his good humor beginning to return. He had risen and was standing in front of her.

"I suppose I ought in fairness to add that he sent me a polite note," said Lesley, glancing up at Mr. Northbrook and then looking down and beginning to draw patterns on the floor with the end of her umbrella. "I have n't had time to answer it, and now I shan't have to," she added as

a cheerful afterthought. "If you knew how I hate to write notes you would see how glad I am to have this chance to thank you in person."

"I did n't know you hated to write notes," said Nathan.

"Good-by," said Mr. Northbrook. "I hope you will have a pleasant time with your friends, Miss Chilton."

"Don't go yet," she begged. "My train does n't leave for twenty minutes."

"Thirteen," Nathan murmured, as he glanced at the clock.

"I must go. I ought not to have taken the time to come here, but I understood you were to be alone, and thought you might find me useful."

"I shall find you very useful as it is. You can carry my bag and Mr. Hart can take my golf cape."

"I think Mr. Hart can manage them both. Good-by, again."

Lesley stood up and forced Mr. Northbrook to shake hands with her. "Good-by, if you must go," she said. "It was very kind of you to take the time to come here to see me," and then she added in a lower tone, "I thank you so much for the lovely flowers."

It did not occur to Lesley until some time later that Mr. Northbrook might have thought Nathan Hart had taken the journey all the way from New York with her, and that her anxiety to go on the morning train was in order that she might have

him for a companion. Well, she could not help it if he did think so. And, after all, what did it matter ?

It was good to get back to Renton and plunge into important work connected with the suffrage club. Of what consequence were one's own petty affairs in comparison with these great issues?

Lesley expected to hear nothing further from Mr. Northbrook, but after she had been at home a week she received the following letter.

MY DEAR MISS CHILTON, — As you are not going to answer my note I am forced to reply to it myself. It was not only for the pleasure of seeing you that I met you at the station the other day, but because I wanted to tell you I had been thinking a great deal on the subject of a college education for Marian. If you had been alone I should have told you that I had been out to Radcliffe to make some inquiries. I went to Smith College afterwards where I saw some of your old friends. The more I see and hear, the more I am strengthened in my opinion that it would be most unwise to send Marian to college. I want you to know, however, that your words produced sufficient impression on me to make me take a good deal of trouble in the matter. What you said about Marian having the feeling, in after life, she had missed something she might have had but for me, hit me in a vulnerable point. But should not a parent be an earthly Providence for his child?

Would not Marian have bitter cause to reproach me in after years, if I should let her carry out the wish of her heart and her strength should be undermined in the process? I am sorry to differ from you on any subject, my dear Miss Chilton, and I hope to convert you to my opinion, or at least to make you see that I am not so selfish and obstinate in the matter as you think.

Sincerely yours,

HENRY BOWEN NORTHBROOK.

This letter rekindled all Lesley's smouldering antagonism to the writer's point of view. Then, too, it hurt her to have him take the impersonal tone with her that he would have done with a stranger. He was, temporarily, the Henry Northbrook she had known merely on paper. She wrote in reply:—

MY DEAR MR. NORTHBROOK, — “Selfish” and “obstinate” are hard terms, which I am sure I could never seriously apply to you, but I do think we are all, unconsciously, warped in our judgments by our desires and experiences. I am willing to admit, that because I passed four happy years at Smith, I am biased in favor of a college education for women, and, on the other hand, I know how hard it would be for you, who have put in print your objections to such an education for them, to recant so far as to send your own daughter to college. It is because I believe you to be generous

and large-minded that I have tried to influence you. I am sure if you were once convinced you were in the wrong no amount of petty criticism would have weight with you. I am glad you went to Radcliffe and Smith, but, if you had taken with you a mind predisposed to be converted to their advantages, would not the result have been different?

You speak of a parent being an earthly Providence to a child, but does not the heavenly Providence give us wide liberty of choice? True, we often make a wrong decision, but does not the benefit we gain by standing on our own feet outweigh the pain that comes when we choose unwisely? Will not the very pain and suffering impress on us the awful responsibility of choice and make us the more ready to decide with greater wisdom the next time? I suppose it is only the very modern woman, who has been taught from her cradle to think, who has a true conception of the seriousness of life. It is no longer possible for us to drift with our eyes shut, as in the old days, but, for good or ill, we must take the rudder in our own hands.

I am not the best person to preach, for I have done nothing, as yet, to justify my college education, but Marian is one of those rare souls, with great intellectual capacity, who is bound to do some work in the world that counts, and where one has marked ability I believe it is important to have all the tools at one's command.

Your other note was charming, but it made me feel like one of Omar Khayyám's roses, that only lives for a day. To me winter is more satisfactory than summer, because it is not so evanescent. I should rather influence my friends to do what I feel is right, than to seem as if I lived in fairy-land.

I have written unsympathetically, I am afraid, but I have had it in my mind to say this to you for a long time.

Yours sincerely,

LESLEY CHILTON.

A few days later Leslèy received an answer that ran as follows : —

MY DEAR MISS CHILTON, — If you would rather be written to with the pitiless logic one uses in writing to an opponent who is a man, so be it. Does not what you say about me apply also to your own point of view? If you were to go to Radcliffe and Smith, honestly looking for all the objections you could find to sending a delicate girl there, would not those institutions bristle with them? Would not the unnatural stimulus to keep up with other girls and take a degree, joined to the absorbing social life, seem to you a grave menace to the health? But I will not recapitulate my objections to a college education for women; you will find them stated at length in a certain article I once wrote which was answered by Ann Smith.

Freedom is a good thing, but a certain amount of protection is needed before any young creature is fitted to stand alone. It is true that the heavenly Providence gives us wide liberty of choice, but He also gives the child his parent to help him make decisions.

You calmly propose that we should stand aside, and see our friends learning through "pain and suffering," which we might have prevented, "the awful responsibility of choice," and you say, "it is only the very modern woman, who has been taught from her cradle to think, who has a true conception of the seriousness of life." Forgive me, my dear Miss Chilton, for saying this shows that you are very modern indeed.

Why cannot you women be content with the gifts the gods have given you, without trying to grasp the Dead Sea fruit of Sodom? Why cannot you be happy in making, like Una, "sunshine in a shady place," summer in the midst of winter storms, a vision of the fountain in the desert?

I have been homesick for you ever since you went away, and you comfort me by telling me you would rather influence your friends to do what you think is right than to seem as if you lived in fairy-land. My dear child, you can't help living there, — to me. You may resort to all the logic at your command, you may write reams of arguments and put as many barriers between us as you choose, but the fact will always remain that there is something in the very essence of our natures, that when

we are together makes me feel I have had a glimpse of the fountain. I do not underestimate the barriers, and I know, alas! that it is impossible to live permanently in fairyland, but why may we not have the comfort of an occasional sojourn there? Why, when we meet, can we not put our divergent views aside?

With sincere regard,

Most truly yours,

HENRY B. NORTHBROOK.

This letter came one morning when Lesley was directing suffrage pamphlets to be sent to different parts of the country. There were sentences in it that she felt should have made her angry, but instead of that the personal words at the end set her heart beating quickly and brought a glow to her cheeks. She had a strong impulse to answer the letter in the spirit in which it was written; to give up, once for all, their controversy and take what pleasure she could from a stimulating friendship with the writer, but she decided the wiser course was to put an end to the discussion by not replying to Mr. Northbrook's letter. "He is a dangerous person," she thought. "This is a very pleasant game for him, but, on the whole, I would rather not play it."

Therefore, instead of writing to Mr. Northbrook, she went back to her work and directed a copy of Ann Smith's Essay on the Higher Education of Women to Miss B. Lucetta Mackintosh, in Tombstone, Arizona.

XX

RECRUITING

THE Suffrage Club was holding a session in Mrs. Madison's pleasant parlors. She had lately returned from a visit to Boston which had been a season of great profit to her, for she attended several absorbingly interesting meetings. She came back to Renton with renewed hope and redoubled zeal.

"The most noteworthy occasion of all," she informed the club, "was an evening when a man and woman on the suffrage side were pitted against a man and woman who were anti-suffragists. Each speaker was allowed ten minutes, and, my dear ladies, the significant part of it was that both the women did so much better than the men. The equal-suffrage woman, of course, was far ahead of the anti-suffragist, because, besides having all the good arguments, she spoke without notes, but both women were to the point, and exactly on time, and the men had only got wound up to begin to speak when their time was up. I felt proud of my sex."

"Why could n't we have something of the sort in Renton?" asked Miss Cynthia Ward.

"I was going to propose it. A debate in my parlors, or, better still, in the church parlors, where

there would be more room, would be most interesting. If we can get Lesley Chilton to speak, the rooms will be thronged."

"I thought she would be here this afternoon," said Mrs. Fairbanks, in her harsh voice. "She seems to have lost her interest since she has come back from New York."

"Not in the least," said Mrs. Madison. "On the contrary, she is more interested than ever. She is coming this afternoon, but said she should have to be a little late."

"For my part, I feel if a thing is worth coming to at all, it is worth being prompt to," said Mrs. Fairbanks.

"I am sure Nathan Hart would speak for us if Lesley did," said Mrs. Palfrey, "but who would represent the anti-suffragists?"

"I would," said Cynthia Ward, "if mother does n't object, and perhaps the judge would speak with me," and she turned to Mrs. Madison.

"No one disapproves of woman suffrage more strongly than my husband does," her hostess replied, "but he has the inconsistency of his sex, and I am afraid you can't get him to speak in public on the subject; however, you are welcome to try, Cynthia."

Judge Madison was coming in at the front door at that very moment, and Miss Cynthia waylaid him in the hall.

The judge had forgotten there was to be a suffrage meeting at the house and was about to go

into his study as usual, when the buzz of voices arrested him, and Miss Cynthia, with her black eyes sparkling, and her trim little figure having a more determined look than ever, darted out of the parlor door.

"Judge," she said, "have you heard of your wife's last plan?"

"I have heard of sixteen plans," he said, as he made his way to the stairs, "but I don't know to which of them you allude."

Miss Cynthia quietly interposed herself between him and the staircase and detailed Mrs. Madison's scheme.

"Judge," she asked finally, "don't you think it will give us anti-suffragists a fine opportunity to show our colors?"

"I think it will be more consistent in you women if you don't speak in public. That's what I think, if you want my opinion."

"Then will you speak for us?"

"I'll be hanged if I will."

Miss Cynthia retreated, inwardly raging at his brusqueness, outwardly smiling, and the judge went upstairs.

Lesley Chilton, who came in just then, flatly refused to take any part in the debate. She was greatly interested, however, and said she would ask Nathan Hart to speak. Mrs. Madison felt that Lesley's youth and charm would have made many converts, but she was not wholly unconciled to her young friend's defection, because now

there was no excuse for her not taking the principal part in the debate herself, and nothing had ever appealed to her so much.

Greatly to the surprise of the community Mrs. Ward consented to her daughter's speaking in public. "I can give you a great many good arguments, Cynthia," she said. "Between us we can get up a very telling paper."

It only remained to find a man who was willing to represent the anti-suffragists, and it was Mrs. Ward who solved this difficulty.

"I thought of it in the watches of the night," she said to Cynthia. "There are some compensations in being kept awake by pain. It is so important to have our side well represented, for Mrs. Madison is better trained than you are. Henry Bowen Northbrook is just the man for us."

"Mother! Mr. Northbrook is too busy to come to a little country town, and he would think it beneath his dignity to take part in such a discussion."

"We'll have it in the Easter vacation. Mark my words, he'll come. If what Emma says is true, he'll snatch at any excuse to get a chance to see Lesley Chilton. You know you told me yourself they correspond."

"I thought I saw a letter in his handwriting one day when I took the Washburns and Lesley their mail, but of course I may have been mistaken."

"Of course," said the old lady sharply. "Maybe they don't write, and maybe he is n't devoted, and maybe Lesley is n't a fascinating girl. Take

it all back, Cynthia Ward. First you pry into other folks' affairs by looking at their letters and then you deny it all."

"Mother, I guess if you carried people their mail, you would n't have the strength of mind to turn all their letters upside down."

"I don't know what I should do," said Mrs. Ward shortly, as she leaned back in her wheel-chair. "The Lord is n't likely to try me at present in just that way. I'll write a letter to Mr. Northbrook, that'll fetch him if anything can."

"He won't come for anything you will say, I am afraid, mother."

"I'll make Lesley write a postscript. Send her over here, Cynthia. Tell her I want to see her on important business. Don't give her a hint what it is. Oh, go, Cynthia! Why are you so slow? I should think you were Emma."

Lesley was out, and Mrs. Ward tried to curb her impatience by making the rough draft of a letter to Mr. Northbrook. She read it to Cynthia, who suggested one or two amendments.

"Very well, if you can do so much better, write one yourself," said the old lady tartly, handing the pencil to her daughter.

"I can't do as well, mother. You asked me to say what I thought about it, and so I did."

"I did n't write it with a view to having it criticised. I read it to you to see if you thought it was all right."

Between them they finally drew up something that Cynthia admitted might do.

MY DEAR MR. NORTHBROOK, — Every one comes back to Renton, sooner or later, as I told you. I hope it will be sooner in your case. We are going to have a very interesting debate on the suffrage question here, and my daughter is to have the honor of being the woman to represent the anti-suffrage side. Her opponent, Mrs. Madison, is a fluent speaker with a zeal for making proselytes. My daughter cannot at all compete with her, as Cynthia has never spoken in public, therefore it is very necessary, my dear Mr. Northbrook, in order to promote the cause which you and I both have so much at heart, that the man who speaks for us should be a man of distinction and wide reputation. We have no such man in Renton. As an old woman I take the liberty of begging you to assist us at this crisis. I am eighty-five years old, my pleasures are few, and I hope you will not deny me this request. The meeting will of course be held at a time subject to your convenience. Let me add that I trust you will be our guest while you are here, and give us as long a visit as you can.

Mrs. Madison hoped that Miss Chilton would speak for the suffragists, but she has declined to do so, which does not seem in the least consistent with her principles, but when was any member of my sex ever consistent? Miss Chilton is taking great interest in the meeting, however, and I am leaving my letter open to get her to add a word.

Your old friend,

CYNTHIA CAMPBELL WARD.

When Lesley saw the letter she was much pleased with it, but at first declined to add any words of her own.

"It is so good just as it is, Mrs. Ward, I am sure nothing could improve it."

"Never mind. Say something. I have said you would write. Don't be silly and make a fuss. You are not on bad terms with him, are you?"

"Oh, no, merely on argumentative terms. He has been writing to me on the subject of a college education for women."

"What a pity it is that you two are not going to have the chance to debate the question in public. What an interest it would give to the meeting!"

"I can't imagine anything which would induce me to do it. And, by the way, Mrs. Ward, speaking of consistency, I don't think it is very consistent in you with your views about girls to want me to speak in public."

"There is a lack of reverence for their elders about the present generation which is deplorable," said Mrs. Ward, with a shake of her head that was counteracted by a gleam in her eye. "And who said, Miss Impertinence, that I was consistent? I am not holding myself up as an example to the sex. Now write," and she thrust the pen into Lesley's unwilling hand. She wrote:—

DEAR MR. NORTHBROOK, — Once you promised to come to hear me whenever I took to the platform. I have been invited to do so, and although I have

declined, it is really the same thing, don't you think so? For Mrs. Madison, who is to speak, can argue much better than I can and might convert you, and then there is the chance that you may convert both of us. You said you would listen to me with the most unqualified disapproval, and I can conscientiously promise to do the same by you. I can also say with equal conscientiousness that I shall be very glad to see you.

Sincerely yours,

LESLEY CHILTON.

P. S. If you don't come I shall know it is because you feel sure in your heart that there are no good arguments on your side.

Whether it was Mrs. Ward's appeal or Lesley's which turned the scale, Miss Cynthia never knew, but greatly to the satisfaction of all three ladies, Mr. Northbrook agreed to come to Renton during the Easter vacation and take part in the debate.

The village was stirred to its foundations by the prospective meeting. As it was an occasion where both sides were represented, the proceeds were to go to the Day Nursery. Lesley went about selling tickets and explaining the object of the discussion from the suffrage standpoint, and she threw herself with her accustomed energy into the work, for not only did she believe in equal suffrage with all her heart, but she had private reasons for being glad to have her mind occupied with a large question. Meanwhile the anti-suffragists, who were passive at

first, were roused by their opponents, and Miss Cynthia, who never did anything by halves, followed in Lesley's wake and undid much of her work.

Judge Madison looked on with cynical amusement. "This arrant nonsense," as he was pleased to call it, had been talked in the sixties and nothing had come of it, nothing ever would come of it. The judge had no very high opinion of human nature, always excepting that of his own family, and it amused him to sit in his chimney-corner, and from this quiet haven watch the world, the ignorant, impetuous, often wicked and always foolish world, making the same mistakes it had made in his youth and labeling them brand-new discoveries, rushing at windmills with quixotic impetuosity, never advancing a step without receding, yet always blindly confident of winning the game. Well, if it amused his wife to take part in this wrangle, let her do it, provided she left him at peace in his library. But when it was decided that the meeting was to be in the Town Hall, because so many tickets had been sold, the judge was exceedingly vexed. Heretofore Amelia had confined the manifestations of her superfluous energy to parlors, and the publicity of her speaking where any loafer was privileged to hear her by paying a quarter was repugnant to his feelings. He expressed his views with his accustomed vigor, but Mrs. Madison calmly went her way, as she always did; and then, almost at the last minute, fate sided for once with Judge Madison, for a slight cold that his

wife had taken, which was accompanied by a sore throat, developed into bronchitis. Mrs. Madison would not have left the field even then if her voice had not deserted her. She called a council of her daughter Kitty, Mrs. Palfrey, Mrs. Greeley, and Lesley Chilton, to decide what should be done.

"We can't put off the debate," she said in a hoarse whisper, "because Mr. Northbrook's vacation ends this week. What shall we do? I have only written down a few notes. I was depending on my memory, for I think it is so much more effective to speak than read. I will write my speech out, however, if one of you ladies will kindly read it for me. I am more sorry than I can say" — Here she was interrupted by a hard fit of coughing.

"Mother, you must n't try to talk," said Kitty, a pretty girl of eighteen, who was going to Smith College in the autumn.

Mrs. Madison sank back in her chair, when her paroxysm was over.

"Will you read the paper for me?" she asked presently, turning to Mrs. Greeley.

"I should be glad to, but Caleb won't let me do it. I told him I was coming here, and he said, 'If Mrs. Madison wants you to take any part Friday night, I simply put my foot down,' and when Caleb puts his foot down, there is no use talking."

"Mrs. Palfrey," said Mrs. Madison with entreating eyes, and a voice that ended in a cough.

"Dear Mrs. Madison, I wish I could do it for

you, but — but I am so frightened, even when I read before the suffrage club ; you know I have n't any voice. I care a great deal about the cause ; if it were anything else, I would gladly do it."

" 'Et tu, Brute,' " Mrs. Madison whispered, with a little shake of the head.

Lesley, meanwhile, had been feeling more and more uncomfortable. She could not plead a Caleb and her voice could easily be heard, but it surely could not be her duty to help out her old friend in this crisis ? Some other way must be found.

"Lesley," said Mrs. Madison, in her hoarse tones that were most appealing, "dear child, I know just how you feel about it, but there is no one else to read my speech. You know Mr. Northbrook, so it won't be so hard to answer him as if he were a stranger." A cough. "And there will be a certain piquancy about the situation because you discussed higher education on paper." Another cough.

"Mother, you really must stop talking."

"It is so humiliating," Mrs. Madison panted. "All those people to hear me, and a world of things to say that I have been thinking of for a lifetime, and then to have to give it up. Lesley," beseechingly, "you ought not to mind speaking in public, after your college education ; my dear Lesley, do come to my rescue."

"If it were to be in the church parlors," Lesley began.

"What difference does it make, a few people

more or less? You have such a delightful voice, and you are the living, breathing image of strong, and yet not strong-minded American girlhood. It would be an object lesson to the audience to see that the cause is espoused by youth and charm."

"I don't feel as if I could speak before such a large audience," said Lesley slowly.

"Of course you feel so, and I honor you for it. You need n't speak; you can simply read my paper. I'll write it out for you word for word. There will be nothing personal about it. It won't be half so personal as having the valedictory at the high school, and you were much younger then."

Lesley went over the situation rapidly, and, although she shrank from appearing in public, she acknowledged to herself that the chief difficulty in her way was the thought of Mr. Northbrook's disapproval. Had it come to this, that she cared so much for the opinion of an adversary that she was willing to stifle her conscience for his sake? If so, the sooner she agreed to help Mrs. Madison the better.

"Don't look at the matter in a merely personal way," her old friend begged. "Think, dear Lesley, of the cause we all have so much at heart. You would make many converts, — far more than an old woman like me."

Lesley clasped her hands together nervously. "If it were anything else" —

"That is what Mrs. Palfrey said," broke in Mrs. Madison. "You are all of you very profuse in your

offers of help, but the only thing I have ever asked that is of vital importance to me, you refuse."

"Dear Mrs. Madison, I don't refuse," said Lesley, "I will read your paper for you."

XXI

THE COMBAT

As the evening of the debate drew near, there was great excitement in Renton, for it was rumored that Lesley Chilton was to be one of the speakers. In a rash moment, Lesley confided to Amy that since she had to appear in public, she would rather give voice to her own ideas, even if they were crude, and Amy caught at the suggestion, for she felt that her mother was in no condition to have the worry of writing a paper at such short notice. Lesley no sooner made her statement than she regretted it, but there was no possibility of honorable retreat. After writing her paper, Lesley decided it would be more effective to speak without notes, so she had the additional labor of committing it to memory. She asked only one favor, that she might come before Mr. Northbrook on the programme, and thus be spared having to answer him without preparation. At first she felt exhilarated at the thought of measuring herself in public against her antagonist, but as the evening came nearer and nearer, all pleasure in the prospect gave way to sickening dread.

"I was a perfect fool to promise to do it," Lesley said, as she and Amy were holding a council

over clothes. "I am scared blue. I know I shall have stage fright and spoil everything."

"Nonsense, dear! You are always so cool."

"It is all very well for you to talk, when you haven't anything to do to-night but listen. I can't think why I was such an idiot. I suppose I had better wear my black gown. I have always maintained that if a woman speaks in public her dress should be as simple as possible, so that people's minds should be no more distracted from her ideas than if she were a man."

As Lesley spoke, she shook out a fascinating, pale gray gown. Then she sighed regretfully.

"It is so pretty," she said wistfully. "And after all, it is very simple," she added, turning to Amy for confirmation, "so little trimming on the skirt and only that fluffy white vest. And yet I feel it would be more in accordance with my principles if I wore my old black *crêpe-de-chine*. It is perfectly respectable and no more conspicuous than a man's coat."

Amy smiled. "If you think the suffrage cause will be advanced by your wearing an old gown, by all means wear it."

"Amy! You know what I mean. Nobody seems to think my principles are a serious matter," she complained. "That is just the kind of remark a man would have made. I didn't expect it from a woman. Well, anyway my audience will see I am in earnest to-night. I haven't put a single frivolous observation into my speech. It

may be dull, but at any rate it will escape the charge of levity. Cynthia Ward's paper is very light, and will make people laugh, but I have answered her seriously. Well, I shall decide on the *crêpe-de-chine*."

"I don't see any reason why you should n't wear your pretty gown if you want to," said Amy. "You can't make yourself old and ugly, no matter what you wear."

"At least I won't have it said that I am dressed too much."

Amy's feelings about the debate were mixed, but she was sure that since there was to be one she wanted it to go off successfully. She devoted a large part of the afternoon to helping Mrs. Palfrey and Mrs. Greeley decorate the hall. It was a bare place, painted a dingy gray and filled with uncomfortable settees, with a gallery running across the back of it and a platform in the front. Some flags were draped across the gallery, and others were put behind the platform; masses of white azaleas in tall jars stood in the background, and a green bowl was filled with them and placed on a table near which the speakers were to be seated.

At seven o'clock the hall began to fill, for many persons who had no interest in the meeting until they heard Lesley Chilton was to speak, repented at the eleventh hour and bought tickets at the door. When Lesley and the Washburns reached the hall, soon after half-past seven, there were only a few seats left.

"I had no idea there was going to be such a crowd," said Lesley in a sudden panic.

At this moment Kitty Madison, who was in the front row with her father and mother, rose and beckoned to them.

As Lesley went down the hall, she could not but be conscious that many eyes were fixed on her, and she heard one girl say to another, "There she is," while a rough looking man observed, "Ain't she a daisy?"

"We've saved some seats here for the speakers until they go on the platform," said Kitty, "and you and Andrew can sit here afterwards, Amy. Isn't it great? I had no idea there would be such a crowd."

Lesley sank into a seat next Mrs. Madison.

"Mother, you ought not to be here," said Amy anxiously.

"I am better," Mrs. Madison hissed out, in something between a whisper and a groan. "I had to come to-night if I died for it," she confided to Lesley.

A few minutes later Miss Cynthia Ward and Mr. Northbrook came down the aisle, and Kitty rose once more and signaled to them. "Here are some seats that I've saved for you," she said as they approached.

Miss Cynthia had the brisk look of a woman of business. Her black hair and bright color gave her a certain external resemblance to her young opponent. She looked like the anti-suffrage mid-

dle-age of Lesley's suffrage youth. Miss Cynthia had on her best black silk with a collar and deep cuffs of white lace.

"I am sorry you did n't wear your gray gown, Lesley," she said. "A girl like you ought n't to dress as quietly as a woman of my age. However, you look very nice," she added reassuringly.

Lesley had not dared as yet to give more than one furtive glance in Mr. Northbrook's direction. He was standing in the aisle talking to the judge, whom he seemed to find amusing, for they were both laughing heartily.

Finally Lesley looked once more at Mr. Northbrook, and just then he caught sight of her, for the first time, and their eyes met. There was a sudden change in his expression, although what it signified she was not skillful enough in reading faces to determine. For a moment he looked visibly embarrassed, actually halted in something he was saying, made a lame conclusion, and then came over to shake hands with her. By this time he had regained his usual self-command, and he said, "Miss Ward tells me, Miss Chilton, that I am to have the honor of overthrowing all your arguments this evening."

Lesley was grateful to him for taking her participation in the debate in such a matter-of-fact way. She wondered if he suspected how her knees were shaking and how dry her throat felt. What horrible agony it would be to sit on the platform with outward calm for half an hour while

Nathan Hart and Miss Cynthia were having their discussion! There was Nathan now! At the sight of his awkward figure, and at the sound of his slow, monotonous voice, her composure partially returned.

"Well, Lesley," he said, "there is n't going to be any trouble about speaking to empty benches. Every seat is full, and they have had to bring in chairs; I guess a good many will have to stand."

Presently Mr. Caleb Greeley joined them. He was a ponderous man both in weight and manner, suggesting that it would be no light matter to have him "put his foot down."

"I think it is about time we adjourned to the platform," he said slowly. "It is now five minutes of eight. I propose to commence my introductory remarks at eight o'clock precisely."

When they had all five taken their places on the platform, Lesley gathered courage to look about her. She was determined no one should suspect that she was frightened, so she leaned across the table and spoke to Nathan Hart.

"There is Martha in the front row in the balcony," she said. "I am glad she has such a good place. Does n't she look resplendent in her black silk and that big cameo brooch? But she seems worried to death, poor dear. I wish Judge Madison was n't in the front row. He has the most amused expression. I suppose he feels it is all a huge joke."

"I am afraid we must stop talking," said Na-

than, for a sudden hush had fallen over the audience, as Mr. Greeley rose, and began a long drawn out description of the object of the meeting. Lesley saw Judge Madison fidget, rearrange his eyeglasses, and say something to his wife, probably in criticism of her choice of a presiding officer; but Mrs. Madison and Lesley were too grateful to Mr. Greeley for consenting to introduce the speakers to be critical, for he was dignified, if somewhat pompous and dull, and this was vastly better than being facetious in an under-bred way, as Mr. Fairbanks would have been, from whose kind offices they had had a hairbreadth escape.

Lesley did not hear half what Mr. Greeley said. He seemed to find every reason why woman should vote, and then every reason why she should not, but finally, after a speech five minutes long, that ought not to have exceeded two minutes, he said, "I shall now introduce the first speaker on the programme to you, ladies and gentlemen; a lawyer well known to many of us, one of our own distinguished fellow-townsmen, who will show us why, from a legal point of view, woman has a right to the ballot. I have the honor of presenting to you Mr. Nathan Barry Hart."

Nathan's speech was sensible, but commonplace and overloaded with statistics. Lesley's spirits sank. He was not holding his audience. Judge Madison, who, she felt, was the index finger of the meeting, moved restlessly, and finally leaned his elbows on his knees and buried his face in his

hands. The judge was never deterred from doing as nature prompted, by any feeling of respect for the conventional. Lesley caught Amy's worried glance, and saw her touch her father gently on the arm. The judge started, scowled, said an angry, "What?" in a whisper loud enough to reach Lesley, then, in obedience to his daughter's mandate, sat bolt upright with the docility of a lamb and the expression of a pagan martyr. Lesley looked at the clock on the front of the gallery. The hands had already covered two thirds of the space of time allotted to Nathan, and he was still groping amid the laws of the middle ages concerning women. "These abuses have all been righted now," he said, finally, "and if I had a little more time," glancing at the clock, "I would give a brief recapitulation of the way the laws in regard to women stand to-day in Massachusetts. I had fully meant to do so, but I have only four minutes left."

Lesley did not dare to look at Judge Madison, to see how he received this characteristic remark. There was one comfort, Nathan would not overrun his time.

"We can see what a change has already taken place," Nathan said, with his eye on the clock, "when we look at this cultivated, enlightened audience, composed largely of women, and remember the days of the old Common Law rule, 'that a man might moderately chastise his wife, with a stick not bigger than his thumb.'"

Nathan enlarged upon the amount of corporal

punishment that was permitted in old times, and was therefore obliged to make an abrupt transition when his last minute arrived : —

“ The long and the short of it is, that if women want the ballot they ought in justice to have it,” he said. “ My opponent will tell you why many of them do not desire it,” he added, looking towards Miss Ward, “ and my coadjutor,” glancing at Lesley, “ will prove to you much more eloquently and persuasively than I can why women do want it and ought to have it.”

There was only faint and perfunctory applause when Nathan sat down, and Lesley felt so acutely sorry for him that she clapped with all her might, and, looking across at the balcony, she saw that Martha, whose hands were encased in roomy, black kid gloves, was clapping as if her life were at stake.

When Mr. Greeley introduced, “ Our fellow-townswoman, Miss Cynthia Campbell Ward,” the audience suddenly waked up, for Miss Ward, with her alert manner, gave the impression that she was sure to keep their attention. She read her speech, sitting behind the table as unconcernedly as if she were in a drawing-room. Her high-pitched voice easily reached every part of the hall, and her paper, sometimes serious, oftener flippant, but always interesting, kept her listeners in good-humor. As ripple after ripple of laughter broke over the assembly, Lesley grew more and more nervous. So far victory was with the anti-suffragists. She saw various persons nod their approval and exchange pleased

glances, and the men smiled at Miss Ward's hits with self-satisfaction. Finally the reader, warming to her subject, abandoned her notes, and made some telling points that Lesley, who had heard the paper before, was not prepared for.

As time passed Lesley was more and more convinced that she must change her tactics and only deliver part of her carefully composed speech, for these new arguments must be answered one by one. She knew if she failed it would be much worse to attempt this than to give the speech she had prepared, but she felt her only salvation lay in making the trial. She sat there with her head a little thrown back, and her knees shaking, hoping she looked competent and unconcerned, with her eyes fixed on that inexorable clock, whose minute hand was gliding along over Miss Ward's allotted quarter of an hour with the relentlessness of fate. Presently Miss Cynthia's paper was at an end, and she sat down amid a tumult of applause. The judge clapped vigorously and stamped his feet, Nathan Hart gave his adversary some warm words of praise, and Mr. Northbrook honored Miss Cynthia with such a smile as Lesley would have gone far to win. But she could not go far enough to abandon her principles, nor did she waver in her determination to treat the subject seriously, although she feared her speech would seem dull after Miss Ward's sallies. Dr. Washburn looked delighted, and Amy's face was a study. Lesley read in it approval of Miss Cynthia's sentiments and sympathy for Mrs. Madison.

"It was just as clever as it could be ; I congratulate you," said Lesley, taking Miss Ward's hand impulsively, and letting it go in order that her friend might receive a great bunch of white roses.

Lesley saw that Mrs. Madison's eyes rested on her beseechingly. "My dear child," she seemed to say, "save us ; everything depends on you."

For a moment Lesley's heart beat so quickly she was hardly conscious of what Mr. Greeley was saying. Suppose the meeting should be a dismal failure through her ?

"I have the honor of introducing to you Miss Lesley Chilton," Mr. Greeley said. "She has had a college training, and therefore an unusual opportunity to judge of the benefit of a higher education for women, and her opinions on the suffrage question ought to be listened to impartially by us all."

As Lesley rose, a wave of applause broke over the audience. She had not been prepared for it, and for the moment was so disconcerted that every idea left her mind. In that one blank minute she suffered tortures. She looked involuntarily at the Madisons, and something in the judge's expression made her draw herself up and say that she would not fail. Even in her quiet dress she was full of radiant charm. Indeed, it seemed to Amy as if Lesley's color and youth were only enhanced by it, while her graceful figure in its black setting stood out against the gray background with the sharpness of a silhouette. Les-

ley's stage fright seemed only a natural pause while she was waiting until the clapping should cease. At last she began to speak in her low, clear voice, a voice that went straight to the heart, and having once been heard lingered there. She looked so young, so simple and unconscious, that her fickle audience, which a moment before had been intrenched in the fastnesses of anti-suffrage, was in a mood to agree with anything she said. She threw herself on the mercy of her listeners, and stated how, at the last moment, she had been called upon to take the place of Mrs. Madison. She told them that she had never spoken to so large an assembly, and begged them to forgive her deficiencies, and if she did not convince them, to remember the trouble lay with her own inexperience and not with the cause she advocated. As Lesley continued, a complete hush came over the company. No one moved. Every one looked at her in absorbed attention. And then her fear left her, and a sense of power that was almost intoxicating, because it was so unexpected, took its place.

"Those of us who believe in a brighter day for women can gain nothing for our cause by underestimating the objections to woman suffrage," she told them. "What my opponent says is true, that women are better fitted by nature for some kinds of work and men for others, but does any thinking person really believe that to give women the ballot would make them eager to rush in and do the work in the world they are least fitted for? We claim

the time has now come when not merely justice but expediency demands that women should have the power to vote. My opponent says that politics will demoralize women as they have demoralized men. This may be true. We claim no superior virtue for women. We merely ask if politics need necessarily demoralize? If we women are able to keep our sense of honor and our high ideals only by being shut away from the world, of what credit to us are they? Or of what practical value? If this is true of women, it is equally true of men. There is no great gulf fixed between men and women. And yet who advocates shutting men away from the world's conflict that they may keep their conscience without stain and their sense of honor intact?"

As Lesley went on to make a plea for the higher education of women, and said that once the same objections were made to it that are made in the South to-day to the higher education of the negro, she grew eloquent. So far she had carried her audience with her, and she had the exhilaration of the orator, the stimulating feeling that she had it in her power to bend and sway this great assembly. Nothing she had ever done in all her life had given her such a moment of transcendent happiness. Her brain had never felt clearer, and as she took up one after another of Miss Ward's arguments merely to refute them, Lesley felt as if she had discovered a new sense, so intense was her consciousness of her own power. Throughout it

all was the knowledge that at her right sat Mr. Northbrook, forced for once to take her seriously, compelled to listen to her ; and, differ from her as he must, she knew that he would at least see that her beliefs were no transient whim, but the most earnest convictions.

“ We are told we expect the millennium will come with woman suffrage,” she said, towards the close of her speech. “ Alas ! until human nature changes we do not expect the millennium ; we only hope the struggle each individual soul must make as it goes through the world will be a little easier ; that the time when men and women will be the friends and comrades they were meant to be will come a little sooner. If we had the thorough training during all our life that men have, and were willing to work as hard as they do, we could meet them on equal terms, and should no longer be treated as charming children. If the two sexes had equal rights, they would work together naturally and simply.” Lesley then considered the effect of equal suffrage and a higher education on the wives and mothers of the race.

“ My opponent claims,” she said, “ that the great work of the majority of women is to be sympathetic wives and wise mothers. We feel this too. But does any thinking man or woman really believe that a woman will be a more sympathetic wife, or a wiser mother, because she is ignorant ? Does a thorough education and the knowledge of the government of her country — such a knowledge as she

can only get from some participation in the world's affairs — mean that she will be less qualified to bring up her children? If any intelligent man believes this, what does it mean? It means that he prefers relaxation and amusement to sympathy and companionship. And if a woman knows nothing about politics, will this help her to educate her sons to take their part later in the wider life of the world? Women are now allowed their voice in business corporations and in church government, why should they be excluded from the affairs of the state?"

As Lesley amplified these points she warmed more and more to her subject, and ended with a picture of the woman of the future, stronger, wiser and more tolerant than the woman of the present, yet losing nothing of her womanliness through the development of her highest faculties. When she finished there was a storm of applause. To judge by the enthusiasm of the audience it had been converted in a body to suffrage. As she sat down, glowing with the sense of having done her best, a great bunch of deep red roses was brought to her. She was sure it was from Mr. Northbrook, but she did not have courage to look in his direction. She was so intent on her own thoughts, that she did not hear one word of Mr. Greeley's introduction, and when she next looked up, Mr. Northbrook was beginning his speech. His delightful voice invited one's attention, and his finished way of speaking held it. He was the only one of them who had had any practice in public speaking, and the long training told.

"It seems ungracious to oppose hard facts to enthusiasm," he began, "but this must be my uncongenial task."

He said that in a meeting of this kind he could only touch the surface of the question, and not take up the more serious objections to woman suffrage. He began with the general subject of the higher education for women, and said it had been estimated that nine tenths of the sex married, and therefore unless higher education helped them to make better homes it was not a success. He believed that in many respects it was a failure, and that the education of the sexes ought to proceed along different lines. He thought it would be as irrational for the average woman to give her chief attention to Latin and Greek, the higher mathematics and science as it would be for a man who meant to be a lawyer to devote himself to studying music and landscape gardening. He felt that women should be taught the branches that would help them in after life, household decoration, drawing, music, hygiene, sanitation, and nursing.

"It is idle to try to ignore the differences of sex," he said, "and worse than folly to take down the barriers between men and women. Nothing can make them the same, and since womanhood, in its perfection, is so exquisite a product, something so wholly out of the reach of man to become, why should her well-wishers hope to vulgarize and cheapen her by making her an imperfect copy of man? The two sexes were meant to complement, not to imitate each other."

He stated his objections to woman suffrage forcibly, and incidentally gave as one illustration, the amount of time it took to organize a primary meeting. "Why," he asked, "when this work can be done by men, should women waste their strength on it?" Then he urged that women should give more of their attention to making ideal homes. As he continued, his personal magnetism made itself felt, and he soon had his audience under his control. Lesley was constrained to admire the way he put things, no matter how much she disagreed with him, but when he made an eloquent plea for a better home life, a purer state of society, she was deeply stirred. He gave a picture of what home might be, the man doing his part in the outside work of the world, the woman helping him to keep his ideals, and making a little oasis of peace and beauty at home. It was an alluring description, but Lesley felt that something was lacking, that nothing permanent could be gained where half of society was blind to the real facts of life and lived in a dream, however beautiful. No, until evil and sin were understood and squarely faced by the entire community there could be no radical reform. She pictured to herself the woman of an old-fashioned type, like her dear aunt Irene, going through the world with such grace and sweetness that she brought peace and comfort everywhere, shutting her eyes to evils beyond her power to remedy, but always unconsciously an influence for good. She glanced at Amy Washburn, who was

another in the same class, but something in Lesley protested against this limiting of a woman's power. For good or ill she herself belonged in a different company, she must take her place with the reformers of the world. Her taste was frequently jarred on by the flippancy and exaggeration of some of the leading suffragists, her nice sense of justice was often disturbed by the unfair way in which they treated their opponents, her love of ease and of the beautiful sometimes made her long to give up the struggle and sink back into a thoughtless life of pleasure, but something stronger than herself cried out in her that it was with the reformers that health lay. No, it was only by making a stand for a possible life of equal participation in the world's struggles, that a woman could ever hope to materially help the condition of things.

And yet how well Mr. Northbrook spoke ! with how much feeling ! Lesley could not rid herself of the idea that he was speaking to her, that he was giving her his ideal of life as he would never have dared to do if they had been alone. And yet, in spite of the plausible form in which his views were put, Lesley found herself combating them, point by point, and as his speech drew to a close she had a sense of having regained her freedom. How could he ever have had such power over her ? How could she have been so strongly attracted to a man who differed so radically from her in his way of looking at life ?

It was over, and he sat down in the midst of warm

applause. It was not so enthusiastic as what had been accorded her, but she knew instinctively that her greater apparent victory had been won on account of her youth and sex.

As Lesley and her companions stepped down from the platform they were surrounded by a host of admirers. Even the quiet Amy was in a flutter of excitement.

"Oh, Lesley," she said, grasping her friend's hand, "it was glorious, how could you do it? Everything you said seemed unanswerable until Mr. Northbrook spoke, and then I could n't help feeling that he was right, after all."

"My dear," Mrs. Madison croaked, "you impressed them far more than I could have done. My cold was providential," and any feeling of envy or disappointment the older woman may have had was swallowed up in her thought of the good of the cause.

The judge next shook hands with Lesley. "My dear," he said, "I never knew a young woman who was more in need of a wise husband to knock the nonsense out of her."

Finally Lesley escaped from her friends, and she and Miss Ward and the Washburns made their way out of the now half empty hall. When Lesley and Miss Ward reached the vestibule, they saw that the steps and sidewalk were crowded with rough-looking men who were evidently waiting for a glimpse of them. They turned back and took shelter behind the door, but it was

too late, the men had caught sight of Lesley and some one set up a shout of "Three cheers for the pretty girl who wants to vote."

The cheers followed lustily. Mr. Northbrook and Nathan Hart came up at this moment. "Take my arm, Miss Chilton," Mr. Northbrook said, while Nathan was forced to offer his to Miss Ward.

"Isn't there a back way out of this hall?" Mr. Northbrook asked.

"No."

"Then you and Miss Ward must go in and wait until I send these men home. They will make it disagreeable for you."

"I don't want to seem to mind them," said Lesley. "They don't mean to be rude. It is just that they don't know any better."

She disengaged herself from Mr. Northbrook's arm and stepped forward. As she stood in the doorway in her gray evening cloak, with a black lace scarf over her head and the bunch of red roses in her hand, a murmur of admiration ran through the crowd, and they cheered heartily once more. One man detached himself from the rear of the company and swayed forward, talking thickly. Mr. Northbrook's dissatisfaction that had been swiftly growing throughout the evening culminated in indignation. It was intolerable to him that Lesley should have put herself in a position where she could be subjected to such disagreeable notoriety.

"Take my arm!" This time it was a command;

and he seized her almost roughly, and tried to make her go back into the hall. "You don't know what these men may do; some of them have been drinking. Come with me."

But Lesley once more detached herself from him, and again went to the doorway. Before Mr. Northbrook realized what she was going to do she began to speak. Her voice trembled slightly at first, but she gathered courage as she went on.

"I thank you," she said, "for your approval of my speech. I hope you will go home and think over what I have said, and remember that women who have the good of other women at heart care more for deeds than for applause. I hope you will all go back and try to make life easier for your mothers and wives and sisters. Women have a hard time as things are now; but if you haven't it in your power to give us the suffrage, you can at least each do something to make the women happier whom you care most for."

She paused, and a laborer near her said, "That's right."

"Good-night," she said, in her low, clear voice. "I want you to make way for us to come down the steps, please. And do not forget to-night. Let it help each one of us to be truer, braver, kinder."

There was no cheering now, only the most quiet attention; and the rough crowd divided respectfully as Lesley and her party passed down between them.

As they went along the street, Lesley found herself walking ahead of the others by Mr. Northbrook's side.

"Take my arm," he said, "and let me carry your roses. Not that you need my services, you have proved your ability to take care of yourself."

Lesley had never been so little excited by Mr. Northbrook's presence. The evening's experience had stimulated and stirred her to such an extent that, for the moment, she felt lifted quite above her ordinary level. The great causes of the world seemed the things to live for. He, on the contrary, had never been so keenly alive to Lesley's charm. When he had seen her sitting on the platform, it had seemed to him intolerable that she should be there. He had felt she was as much out of place as a rosebush would be in the crowded business thoroughfare of a city. All his inherent prejudices were jarred on. He had a mad desire to take her roughly by the arm and tell her that it was no place for her, and lead her back to the quiet ranks of the audience. When she began to speak, he too had fallen a victim to the magnetism of her personality; he had been unwillingly obliged to admit, that if she were going to speak in public, she could not have done it in a more womanly way. He disagreed with her at every step; he said to himself over and over again, "This is the point of view of the idealist; an innocent child could hardly speak of life with less com-

prehension," but he acknowledged that it was a generous and noble-minded child, and for the first time he saw the deeper side of Lesley's nature, and something very like reverence mingled with his sense of her fascination.

As they were fast walkers they reached the door of the Washburns' house some time before the others, and as it was a mild evening they lingered on the porch. There was no moon, but the stars were shining brightly, and as Lesley glanced at those far-away points of light, the magnitude of the universe seized her imagination. The plan was so immense, and they themselves seemed such specks in the eternal progression. Presently Amy's gentle, happy laugh was heard in the distance.

"I will take my roses now, please," said Lesley. "And I have you to thank for them, have I not?" She looked so young, and was so full of feminine charm as she glanced up at Mr. Northbrook, that it was hard for him to remember how the evening had been spent. It seemed indeed as if he were seeing a girl home from her first ball.

"I wish I had sent them," he said regretfully.

"You promised if I ever spoke in public you would give me your unqualified disapproval, joined to a bunch of red roses," she reminded him reproachfully.

"So I did, but your speaking was sprung on me after I got here."

"That is not a sufficient excuse. However, I suppose I ought to be satisfied, since you gave me your unqualified disapproval. By the way, nobody gave you any flowers. It is very unfair, this division of the sexes. To prove that I believe in equality I will divide my roses with you," and she began to separate them into two bunches.

"One rose will be quite enough for 'the likes of me.'"

"No, you must have half, or none. One rose is too symbolical of all I have been talking against to-night. You want us to have all the roses, but when it comes to the things we really care about, the things that make us happy, you don't want to give them to us, — you and others like you. Isn't it so?"

"I suppose it is, and therefore to be strictly consistent I ought to refuse to take half. As I intimated before, one rose will make me very happy; but I suspect you don't want to make me very happy; what you want is to be happy in your own way."

"I am afraid you are right," she owned, "but isn't it true of you also?"

The others were at the gate now, and as Nathan turned to go across the street with Miss Cynthia, he glanced at the two figures standing in the full glare of the doctor's electric light.

"I am not going to give you any of my roses," Lesley said hastily to Mr. Northbrook. "Won't you come in?"

"No, I thank you."

"You will at least shake hands with me, if you do disapprove of me?"

He took her hand and pressed it warmly. "Good-night, my enemy," he said, but the word sounded like a caress.

XXII

A TRUCE

THE morning after the debate Mr. Northbrook called at the Washburns'. It was the day for giving the parlors a thorough sweeping, and the rooms were dismantled. Martha, with her head tied up in a red silk handkerchief, was standing over Nora, vigorously keeping her up to the mark.

"Those corners have got to be swept out thorough this time," she said in a determined tone.

The bell rang and Nora dropped her broom with alacrity.

"I'll go to the door," said Martha majestically. She was standing by the window and saw who was coming.

"Good-morning, Mr. Northbrook," she said cordially. "It is a pleasant day, isn't it? I'm glad to have a chance to tell you how well I liked your remarks last night. If I'd written that speech myself it could n't have stated my views better."

"That is high praise, Martha. I am glad we agree so well. Are the ladies in?"

"Mrs. Washburn has just gone out to market, but she'll be back before long. Miss Lesley is very busy getting off some of that suffrage trash,

and she left orders she was n't to be disturbed unless it was something very particular."

"I am only going to be here to-day, so I hope she will see me."

"She leaves things mostly to my judgment," Martha confessed. "And then if my judgment ain't the same as hers, she finds fault. The other day when she was busy, I let in Mr. Greeley, — he'd come with some kind of a petition, — and Miss Lesley was real put out. She said, 'Martha, did n't I tell you I was too busy to see any one?' So I took her at her word, and when Judge Madison called, and his daughter was out, I told him Miss Lesley had given me particular orders not to let any one in; and afterwards she said, 'Martha, you knew perfectly well that I would see Judge Madison if the sky was falling.' Those were her exact words. 'An old man like that, and one of my best friends. It was a shame to let him go away!'"

"Perhaps you had better take up my card," Mr. Northbrook suggested, "and then Miss Chilton can see me or not, as she chooses."

"You need n't waste one of your cards at this time in the morning. We ain't formal in Renton, and I know who you are."

Lesley was hard at work at her desk addressing suffrage pamphlets when Martha entered.

"You've a caller," she announced indifferently.

"I told you I was too busy to see any one."

"How fresh those roses have kept!" said Mar-

tha. "It was real kind of Mr. Hart to send them, and he gave those white ones to Miss Cynthia. I never knew such a thoughtful man. 'T was him got me that good place in the gallery. I don't like his views so well as Mr. Northbrook's, but when it comes to actions, he can beat him hollow. So I'm to tell Mr. Northbrook you're too busy to see him?"

"Mr. Northbrook! You did n't say it was Mr. Northbrook. Of course I'll see him. You are enough to try the patience of a saint."

"I don't get much chance," Martha retorted, as she left the room.

"Miss Lesley'll be very happy to see you," Martha said to Mr. Northbrook, assuming her prim company manner, "and will you please to come up into her parlor, Mrs. Washburn's is all upset."

The door was open, and Mr. Northbrook had an impression of individuality and vivid charm as he glanced from the darker hall into Lesley's bright sitting-room. She was seated by her writing desk, which was strewn with pamphlets, as was the floor near it. She rose and greeted him with a matter of fact cordiality that was calculated to check any growing sentiment.

"It was very good of you to come," she said. "I hope you will forgive this clutter, but I am addressing suffrage pamphlets. By the way, have you ever discovered what a good place the floor is for those that are done? I drop them down

there as I finish them, and they can't possibly get blotted."

"I am glad to find that while our principles differ our methods of work are so precisely the same," he said.

Meanwhile he was taking in the component parts of the charming room. Lesley's Steinway piano occupied one corner, and there was a table in the centre with books and magazines scattered about on it in careless comfort. There were interesting photographs and etchings in black frames on the dull red wall, and there were quaint mahogany chairs, and a sofa piled with variegated cushions. On the piano stood Lesley's roses in a green jar. It gave Mr. Northbrook a jealous pang to see them so carefully cherished. Lesley herself was a cool note of color in the cheerful room. She had on a pale gray morning gown with white collar and cuffs and belt. She sat down in the chair by her desk and he sat opposite her.

"How many of those things have you got to do?" he inquired, as he looked at the pile of pamphlets.

"About a hundred more this morning."

"It is a shame for you to waste your time like that. There must be dozens of women in town who have just as good a handwriting and not as good brains. Why do they make a slave of you?"

"I am sorry you don't like my handwriting," she said perversely. "It is poor I know. As you have an unusually good handwriting," she added

gently, "does n't it seem as if it were the hand of fate that sent you here at this crisis? It would be a Christian deed if you would direct some of those pamphlets for me. They have got to go by the one o'clock mail."

"Hang the pamphlets!" he ejaculated under his breath.

"I did n't quite hear," she said sweetly. "I caught something about pamphlets. It sounded like, 'I should be delighted to help you; there is nothing I should enjoy more than directing pamphlets.'"

She left her seat and motioned to him to take it. The desk was an old-fashioned secretary with brass-handled drawers above and below. Lesley brought up a chair, and cleared off a place for herself at the centre table. She handed Mr. Northbrook a sheet full of closely written addresses, and a pen with a silver handle.

"Just scratch your pen through each one as you finish it," she said in a business-like tone. "Here are the wrappers. We shall get through much quicker if we both work."

"And you expect me to help you direct suffrage pamphlets? Upon my word that is cool!"

"Is n't it," she assented calmly. "That's why I asked you."

"When did you say the confounded things must go?"

"On the one o'clock train."

"Give them to Martha to do, and come and take a walk with me."

"I don't know how men feel about such things," she assured him, "but when a woman undertakes a piece of work, she feels that nothing must interfere with it. Conscientious performance of duty is the chief characteristic of our sex."

She looked at him with an audacious little smile.

"If I must do it, let me sit at the table," he said. "I don't want to turn you away from your desk."

"Very well. I will go and borrow some ink. We can't possibly get on with one inkstand."

She returned presently and seated herself at the desk.

Although Lesley's back was turned to Mr. Northbrook, her presence was a disturbing factor. He would write one or two addresses and then fix his eyes absently on her dark hair and on her charming figure. Once she turned to say something and caught him looking at her with his pen poised idly in the air.

"You are shirking," she said. "I have directed twenty since we began; how many have you done?"

"Six," he said humbly, "but see how well they look!"

She came over and stood by his side to inspect his work.

"Your handwriting has more style and finish than mine," she admitted. "I hope Miss Amabel Porter Jones, of Skyville, Montana, will appreciate the difference."

"I hope so."

He looked up at her with a smile, and she smiled down at him. It suddenly struck them both that this was one of the most delightful mornings they had ever passed.

At this point Dr. Washburn came in abruptly, saying, "Where's Amy? Oh, good-morning, Mr. Northbrook; you're in the business, I see. Did she convert you last night?"

"No, I converted her to thinking that our sex is useful at a pinch."

They had nearly finished their work when Paul dashed in and wailed, "Aunt Lesley, I've cut my hand and mother has n't come in. Where's the court-plaster?" — the court-plaster evidently being the next best substitute for maternal solicitude.

"Are you interrupted like this every morning?" Mr. Northbrook asked, after Paul and the court-plaster had departed in close juxtaposition.

"This is n't a circumstance to what happens generally."

"When you are practicing, too?"

"Yes."

"It is a burning shame. Why don't you lock your door and put up a card on the outside with 'No Admittance'."

"If I had, that would have shut you out among the others, and you have been of great use. We've almost finished."

"Chuck the rest of the confounded things into

the waste-paper basket, and come out and take a walk with me."

"We should be interrupted a great deal more. Every one would stop me and say something about last night."

When the pamphlets were finished and Martha was despatched to the mail with them, Lesley got her work and sat down on the red-cushioned window-seat.

"I am one of those women whose chief pleasure in life is to sew," she said, as she shook out a dainty white chiffon boa edged with black lace.

"I wish you would n't work. I want your undivided attention."

"How inconsistent you are! Was n't the whole object of your speech last night to prove that woman in her perfection is always sitting in her little kingdom with a needle in her hand? Here am I fulfilling my destiny in both particulars, and you try, first to get me to go to walk, and next to be idle."

"Miss Chilton! How perverse of you! I did not say anything of the kind! and since when, may I ask, have you had this overpowering desire for feminine industry?"

"Since last night. You made me feel that if we want the suffrage we must prove that we can do both the little and the big things equally well. Seriously, however," she said, dropping her work, and looking up at him earnestly, "I am glad of a chance to discuss some things you said last night."

What you said about women making happy homes has such a plausible sound, and of course they must do their part, but so must the men. I don't think you realize the grind and utter discouragement some women have in the middle and lower classes. The men make it almost impossible for the women to make happy homes. Dr. Washburn has told me so much about what he has seen. If a man has an unhappy marriage, he can find his consolation in outside work, and if he grows reckless and consoles himself in wrong ways, the world is very tolerant; but if the woman sins, she goes under. There are very few women who do go under; I can't understand how they keep as steadfast as they do. They lose all happiness in life, they break down from the dreary strain or from overwork, they lead lives pitifully bare, but, as a rule, they live up to their standard of duty. Sometimes I think about these things and other things that are worse, — that one cannot even speak of, — until my blood boils; and I feel if there is anything I can do, any little thing to help women, I will slave and toil all my days. If sending pamphlets will convert people to believing that if women were to have the suffrage there would be better laws, I will cheerfully direct them all my life."

"But, my dear Miss Chilton, as you said last night, human nature would still be human nature if women had the suffrage. There are black things in the world, God knows! We can't dodge the

fact. For myself, I would rather face the truth; but I don't want you and others like you to face it; I want a few illusions left. It helps the world to be better, if there are those who think it better than it is."

"I don't want illusions," protested Lesley. "I only know that bad as things are, there is also a leaven of good, and this leaven seems to me so beautiful that I rejoice to be in the world. I am often careless and aggressively happy. I make chiffon boas for myself, while I dare say my neighbors are suffering for clothes. And I feel I am right. I can't explain it, but in some blind way I feel we are here not only to fight, and work, and right great wrongs, but also for happiness, yes, even for light-hearted frivolity. I suppose I am the kind of woman who will always undertake suffrage pamphlets and chiffon boas in the same morning."

"Heaven bless you for that."

He stayed an unconscionable length of time, and their conversation was as varied as were Lesley's occupations.

At last he said regretfully, "I promised Mrs. Ward I would come back to dinner, so I must say good-by, now. And I go to New York this afternoon. We shall have to postpone the rest of our talk until summer. How early do you go to Mt. Desert?"

"I am not going at all. I am planning to stay all summer in Renton."

There was a pause. After a moment Mr.

Northbrook said coldly, "I knew Mrs. Hallett was to be in her house this summer, but she said she thought you would take the Allens' house."

"No, I never had any idea of it."

"Mrs. Hallett said you would be sure at least to make her a long visit."

"Mrs. Hallett has a vivid imagination. I don't expect to leave Renton this summer."

"Then I shan't see you again until I get home from Europe."

There was another pause. Lesley was calculating how many months it would be before September. Only the night before she had congratulated herself on her indifference to Mr. Northbrook, and now she had a sense of the utter unsatisfactoriness of life. Then they shook hands quietly and wished each other a pleasant summer.

XXIII

DÎS ALITER VISUM

It was September when Mr. Northbrook next saw Lesley Chilton, and other people were directing suffrage pamphlets, for Lesley's interest was centring around Amy's baby, a little three months old creature with blue eyes and laughing mouth; such a very new woman that all the problems of the other new women were temporarily forgotten. The baby was named Lesley Chilton Washburn, and this fact gave Lesley greater joy than anything she had ever known. Lesley went across the street to stay with the Wards while the nurse reigned in the house, but she saw Amy every day, and for two months she had been back in her old quarters, sharing the care of little Lesley. Something in her heart that she had not known she possessed had awakened, and in the intense and passionate love which she felt for Amy's child, her whole scheme of life was remodeled, and all the values changed. To live in the same house with this adorable little creature was better than anything she had ever known. To be allowed to hold the helpless mite in her own strong arms, awkwardly at first, and afterwards with the ease of practice and tender understanding, was the keenest pleasure. Lesley no longer tried to solve the

riddle of the universe, Amy and Amy's baby were answer enough.

The Northbrook children spent the summer in Renton while their father was in Europe. This was Mrs. Ward's plan. She could see no reason why her Emma should be banished to Mt. Desert while Mr. Northbrook was enjoying himself abroad, and, indeed, the scheme of having his family in Renton appealed strongly to him. The Madisons were glad to take the two boys to board, and Mrs. Ward took Marian and Charlotte into her household. The boys quickly struck up a friendship with Theodore Madison and Paul Washburn, while Marian became absorbed in a close intimacy with Kitty Madison. Kitty was going to Smith college in the autumn, and Marian was to be at Radcliffe. Her father had at last reluctantly given his consent, in consequence of the fact that the Winships had taken a house in Cambridge, in order that their niece might live with them. Marian longed to go to Smith with Kitty Madison, and Marian's father longed to keep her at home with him. Each had compromised, and neither was satisfied, but Marian was too docile and unselfish to let her regrets be known.

Charlotte was the only one of the Northbrook children who did not find a companion of her own age. She played alternately with the boys and Caroline Madison, who was some years her senior, and the fact that she often was not wanted, and was frequently snubbed, did not permanently cloud

her cheerful spirit. It was impossible to long extinguish this lively and fascinating little girl. After being completely crushed, she would rise immediately with the avidity of a Jack in the box, and if the unkind treatment of the children sometimes caused floods of tears, smiles would follow with the speed with which the sun succeeds an April shower.

Lesley received the news that the Northbrooks were coming to Renton with mixed feelings. She had hoped for a summer wholly detached from the thought of Mr. Northbrook. She knew it was much better for her to see as little of him as possible. There had been moments when she suspected she had it in her power to make him care seriously for her; she hoped this would never happen, for in that case she would have to put an end to their acquaintance, as nothing would induce her to let herself get deeply interested in him. It was a pity, when the external facts of their lives pointed to a safe, tranquil friendship, that something in their natures made it impossible to maintain the cool conditions necessary to it. No, for her own peace of mind she must see him very seldom. And then Amy's baby had come, and this new interest had weakened Lesley's feeling for Mr. Northbrook.

She heard from him twice during the summer, — once he wrote from Heidelberg, a place he was sure she would delight in, and again from Oxford. His letters were without a trace of sentiment, for

which Lesley was grateful, as she could pass them around among the little circle of his admirers with an unconcern that put an end to gossip.

And now it was September, and one afternoon when Lesley and Amy were sitting on the back piazza with the baby, Martha brought out Mr. Northbrook's card.

"I told him it wa'n't necessary to send it," said Martha, "but he would do it."

"You had better go into the parlor to see him, Lesley," said Amy.

"No indeed. He wants to see us both. Ask him out here, Martha."

The baby was in Lesley's lap at the time, and Amy offered to take her, but Lesley held the little creature close. The baby seemed like a strong bulwark. With the little Lesley in her arms it would be easy to keep herself outwardly cool and indifferent when she greeted Mr. Northbrook. He was coming out between the long glass doors now, and her heart began to beat so painfully fast that she did not dare look him fully in the face lest she should betray her agitation. He paused for half a minute in the doorway, glancing from Amy, with her Madonna face and unobtrusive happiness, to Lesley, with Amy's baby in her arms. Lesley had on a muslin gown flowered over with yellow roses, and she wore a string of amber beads around her neck. Mr. Northbrook had not seen her in colors before, and he was struck anew with her beauty. He shook hands very cordially

with Mrs. Washburn and somewhat stiffly with Lesley, and then sat down in a piazza chair that was close to hers.

"I must introduce you to this little person," said Lesley, as she held out the baby's right hand. "I have the honor of presenting you to Miss Lesley Chilton Washburn. I thought I had been happy before, but now I find that until one has a namesake one does n't begin to know what true happiness is."

The baby curled her little fingers around Mr. Northbrook's thumb and would not let it go.

"She is a most promising namesake," he said. "I suppose you are beginning to see already that she is brought up in the way she should go, Miss Chilton. She will imbibe all the most modern ideas about women while she is in her cradle."

"The modern baby does n't have a cradle," said Lesley.

"I thought the modern baby was n't held," he observed. "Should n't she be put down flat somewhere, and no attention paid to her?"

"Theoretically she should, but it is quite too much to expect Amy and me to be theoretical where a baby is concerned."

He glanced at Lesley's amber beads, and she said quickly, "I suppose you are surprised to see me in colors. It was almost a year and a half after Aunt Irene died when the baby was born, and after that I could n't wear black any more. I knew Aunt Irene would n't want me to. If your

life is made over new, it seems a mockery to wear mourning; not that I have forgotten dear Aunt Irene, only the pain has all gone out of it. I keep thinking how she would enjoy the baby, and I feel almost as if she were here."

Amy looked across at Lesley in surprise. She had never heard her speak so freely of her feelings.

"Yes," Mr. Northbrook said gently, "I understand."

Her happiness was so independent of him that he felt chilled. He did not want to be engulfed in an overwhelming feeling. His path in life was marked out for him, and any deviation from it would be disastrous to his peace of mind; nevertheless his superfluosness in her scheme of life piqued him. Lesley asked an occasional question about his summer, and then talked to her namesake. Finally Mr. Northbrook turned his attention to Mrs. Washburn, whose mind was half on what he was saying and half on a gown she was making for her little daughter. He had a feeling of poignant jealousy which he realized was utterly ridiculous. He neither expected nor wanted Lesley to be overcome with delight at his return, but he had hoped she would be moderately glad to see him, and her attention was wholly monopolized by a three months old baby. This was worse than suffrage pamphlets.

At last a trim maid appeared and bore the child off, and to Mr. Northbrook's great relief, Mrs. Washburn followed.

Now that he and Lesley were alone an unprecedented shyness seized him. Her left hand was lying on the broad arm of her piazza chair, and he had an impulse that was wellnigh irresistible to take her hand in his, and tell her how dear she was to him. He suspected that if he were ten years younger his judgment would be swamped by uncontrollable feeling, and he congratulated himself on his self-command ; for he feared his loss of it would cause Lesley to put an abrupt end to their friendship in a sudden panic.

“You have a great many grapes,” he said, looking at the purple clusters that hung down from a trellis on the piazza.

“Yes, they are doing very well this year. Don’t you want to come into the garden to see our apple trees, and the peach tree?”

It was difficult to go back to their light-hearted give-and-take banter, and equally impossible to proceed to anything else. Lesley felt ill at ease. She kept thinking how stupid he must find her. They wandered about the garden and Lesley offered him peaches and apples. She asked him questions that Amy had already asked, and showed him all the places in the garden she had loved best when she was a child, the trees she had climbed, and the corner where her flower garden had been. He listened politely, and Lesley felt sure that he was bored. Here it was at last, the time she had looked forward to for five long months, and the moments were slipping by as relentlessly as they

did for Omar Khayyám, as they have done for every human soul since the world began, and will do to the end. The intolerableness of the situation struck her as it had never done before ! How peaceful her existence would have been if she had never known Mr. Northbrook ! How tranquil it was whenever he was far away ! Then she was sure it was better for them to meet as seldom as possible, but now that he was standing by her side, the breath of revivifying life he brought made the calm of the last months seem stagnation. She felt that she could never let him go, and the next minute she was longing to have him leave her at once.

Amy came out presently and asked Mr. Northbrook if he would not stay to supper. He seemed irresolute, glanced at Lesley, who did not second the invitation, and then said he was afraid Mrs. Ward would expect him.

"I'll send Paul over to say you are going to take tea with us," said Amy.

"I am afraid I must n't stay, on the children's account."

And then Lesley, who the moment before had been eager to have him go, had a sense of bitter disappointment. "Can't the children spare you to us for this one evening?" she asked.

"I fancy they can live through it. I will stay with pleasure."

In the days that followed, Lesley shut her eyes to the future and gave herself over to the enjoy-

ment of Mr. Northbrook's society. She knew she should have to pay for her happiness by a corresponding amount of pain, but she ignored this fact, and was her old light-hearted self. A series of picnics and garden parties gave them daily chances to meet. She had never enjoyed him so much, and never found it so hard to have him go. No, she must not see him often in the future. It frightened her to find how much more she cared for him every time they met. She felt as if she were being hurried along a swift stream, and were near the edge of a waterfall, but she would not let herself go over. She would grasp at the rocks in the river, the welcome rocks of common sense. She knew instinctively that Mr. Northbrook was growing to care more for her every day; but she trusted that his hatred of change and his dread of strong emotions would keep him from letting himself be carried any farther along the stream. She suspected that if he had the least idea how much she cared for him, he would throw prudence to the winds, and feeling this, she steeled her heart for both their sakes. What madness it would be, — the marriage between a girl with talent, money, and the absolute control of her fate and a man of nearly twice her age, who was deeply imbedded in a rut of prejudice, and who treated the chief enthusiasm of her life as an amusing fad; a man with four children, one of them only seven years younger than herself! Such a marriage would be preposterous for the woman and almost equally

so for the man, who, if he married again, ought, by all the laws of the fitness of things, to choose a woman of a suitable age, who would share his old-fashioned views of life.

And meanwhile there were crisp September mornings when the world seemed blue and gold, and there were golden and blood-red sunsets, and maples that were beginning to dip themselves in sunset hues, and this wealth of color was succeeded by peaceful evenings when the black trees were etched against the silver moonlight. At sunset, when Lesley looked at the horizon where the edge of the world touched the sky, there seemed to be mystery upon mystery in that far-away cloud line; things beautiful beyond belief, of which she had but a vague hint; spiritual truths which she only half perceived; and a certainty of the final good, that sometimes flooded her soul with a sense of inexpressible happiness.

One afternoon Lesley went with a small party, including the Washburns and Northbrooks, to Saunders Pond, where they were to take their tea. Amy recalled the fact that it was almost two years since the day when they had their improvised picnic there. She was sitting on the front seat of the carriage with her husband, while Lesley and Mrs. Winship, who was staying at the hotel for a few days, were behind.

"The trees are turning much earlier this year," said Amy. "Do you remember, Andrew, how that maple by the Grants' barn was just such a

flame of color as it is now? — and it was two weeks later.”

Andrew remembered that and other facts, and Lesley suspected that his homeward drive with Amy that evening had been the beginning of their interest in each other.

There were boats to let, an innovation that had come in the last two years, and the men of the party were soon making plans to take the others out on the water. Lesley was besieged by Nathan Hart and by Amy's brother Jeffrey, a Harvard student. Each was urging her to go in his boat, and she was saying that as there was not room for every one she would stay behind with Mrs. Winship.

“Come, Miss Chilton,” said Mr. Northbrook, “as you can't satisfy them both, you had much better simplify things by going in my boat.”

Lesley, however, persisted in her determination. “I would much rather stay with you,” she said to Mrs. Winship. “What is your book? Won't you read aloud to me?”

“It is a volume of Browning,” she replied apologetically. “My brother was quoting something from *Prospice* the other day, and I was going to refresh my memory of the poem. Do you know it?”

Lesley did not; she had to own herself shockingly ignorant of Browning.

Mrs. Winship read *Prospice* aloud, and then as she was turning the leaves she said, “Here's one

of my favorites that few people know, *Dûs Aliter Visum*, a most interesting psychological study."

She had read only the first verse when her brother appeared.

"Thank heaven they are all off at last," he said, with serene inconsistency, flinging himself down on the grass by his sister.

"Mrs. Winship is trying to convert me to Browning," said Lesley.

He glanced over Mrs. Winship's shoulder.

"Don't read her that gloomy thing," he protested.

"But I want to hear it," Lesley insisted.

"I wish you would read it, Henry," said his sister, "you read so much better than I do."

He flatly refused, and said he would read Rabbi Ben Ezra.

Lesley was too familiar with this poem to care to hear it again, and after a little more discussion she said she would settle the question by reading *Dûs Aliter Visum* herself. When she discovered that the poem was about a girl and an older man, who had contemplated for a mad moment asking her to be his wife only to be recalled to his senses the next instant, she regretted her choice of a subject. But there was nothing now to be done but to go on to the end. When she came to the verse —

"She might take me as I take her.

Perfect the hour would pass, alas!

Climb high, love high, what matter? Still,

Feet, feelings, must descend the hill:

An hour's perfection can't recur," —

she felt that Mr. Northbrook's eyes were fixed upon her, but she read on composedly. The descriptions of the sea and of the solitary church fascinated her, and she was so interested in the story of the man and woman that she had only a subconsciousness of her friends until she came to this passage, —

“ Now I may speak : you fool, for all
Your lore ! WHO made things plain in vain ?
What was the sea for ? What, the gray
Sad church, that solitary day,
Crosses and graves and swallows' call ?

Was there naught better than to enjoy ?
No feat which, done, would make time break,
And let us pent-up creatures through
Into eternity, our due ?
No forcing earth teach heaven's employ ? ”

Then she was aware once more that Mr. Northbrook was intently scanning her face. She read on very quietly to the end.

“That is n't what I call a gloomy poem,” she said lightly.

“If you consider it eminently cheerful, I should like to ask what your idea of gloom is,” said he. “It seems to me sufficiently depressing for two souls, ‘ nay four,’ to be lost.”

“They were never meant for each other,” said Lesley. “If he had really cared for her he would have spoken ten years before. She made the mistake of investing him with some of her own insight. If he, too, had felt the meaning of the sea and the gray church and the swallows, it

would have ended differently; but he could n't see, and people who can't see are n't worth regretting."

Mrs. Winship took the side of the man. She believed that the woman, in her retrospect, was unfair to him, and that his hesitation was largely out of consideration for her. Lesley warmly disputed this conclusion, whereupon Mrs. Winship appealed to her brother.

"The man was a fool," he said, "but that does n't prevent my being sorry for him."

They were still discussing the poem when the rest of the party joined them, and in the bustle attending the arranging of a picnic supper, Lesley and Mr. Northbrook were separated. She did not have any further talk with him until it was time to go home, then, as the various carriages were being filled, he asked her if she would not walk home with him and Marian and Kitty Madison.

They were all together at first, but before she quite knew how it happened, she and Mr. Northbrook were out of hearing of their companions, and he was saying how soon he should have to go home. "I never hated to leave a place so much," he said.

"You must hate it," she assented cheerfully, "especially as you won't have Marian this winter. I am so glad she is to go to college. I can't help wishing it were Smith. The life there is so good for a girl."

"I could never consent to let her live the ordi-

nary college life. The fact that she could be with my sister was what made me finally give a reluctant consent to her going to Radcliffe."

For a quarter of a mile, Lesley talked about the advantages of Smith, much pleased with her choice of a subject which she was sure would bring out all her companion's latent disapproval of her, but it was in vain. When they reached the stone bridge over the river, he abruptly cut into her description of the giving of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," at Smith and said, "Look, Miss Chilton, at those dark trees against the sky and at that dull line of yellow light."

"It is very beautiful," she said, and she added a little nervously, "we are a long way ahead of the others; shall we wait here for them?"

"Yes ; no, — I think we may as well be moving on. You said to-day," he began unsteadily, "that if 'Le Byron de nos jours' had really cared he would have spoken. Before I go I want to tell you how much I care for you."

She was conscious of a wild desire for flight; she must stop him before he said anything he would regret, — that they would both regret when they were calmer. But it was of no avail. She might try to turn him aside, she might even use the weapon of flippancy and appear to misunderstand his meaning; but, having once made up his mind to speak, she could no more stop him than she could dam the current of an impetuous stream. As he told her how much he loved her, she listened

breathlessly, reproaching herself for having made this possible, and then she told him very simply how much his friendship had been to her, but how impossible it would be for her ever to give him more.

"To-morrow," she said, "when you are away from me, you will see, too, how it must be as it is. But we are so placed we can have a true friendship such as few men and women can have. Friendship, when it means a kind of inner understanding, seems to me the best thing in life. I don't want you to spoil ours by saying things that will oblige me to put an end to it."

"My dear child, you can't put an end to it. It has taken too deep root in me. You may refuse to listen, you may shut your heart to me, and according to all ideas of worldly wisdom you are wise. When I saw you first this autumn I was wise too, but the last fortnight has taught me it is not wisdom to close one's heart to the one thing that is best in life, and even if I can never make you love me, I will no longer refuse to face facts as they are."

As he went on speaking, his tone of suppressed feeling frightened Lesley. Why had she had such rash confidence in his inertia and his self-control? Her one desire now was to escape from all thought of him, to return to those untroubled days when no man had ever had the power to permanently cloud her serene content. She was too much occupied with her feelings to have any room

left for pity for him. It was when she cared less herself that she had felt sorry. She had been very sorry for Nathan Hart. Now she found herself wishing almost fiercely that Mr. Northbrook might suffer as much pain as she did. She did not want to care for him as he wished, and so she must get far away from his influence, and be once more a free woman with the control of her own life. She would work hard, she would find distraction and interest in her music, she would make new friends, but this other thing, which would so sweep her off her feet that she would cease to be herself, this other thing she would not have. She hardly knew how they got home. Presently he was talking to her very quietly about his summer in Europe. When he bade her good-night at her own gate his voice was so steady that she could almost fancy the scene she had gone through was a dream. After all, strong emotion partook of the character of a dream; it did not represent a normal state of mind. When he thought of his children, — by the way, they had neither of them once spoken of his children, — he would thank her for her wisdom. Perhaps he was already thanking her now, for when he took her hand at parting, he said, "You may trust me not to spoil our friendship."

XXIV

A TRIAL OF INDEPENDENCE

LESLEY was spending the winter in Boston and tasting independence at last. Even Martha, who had heretofore served as a connecting link between her and the past, had been left behind.

Martha decided to take a well-earned rest of a few months, and hired a tiny apartment in Renton.

Lesley wanted to forget the last two years and lose herself in the life of a large city. She had gone to a house on Beacon Street, on the water side, where an acquaintance of her aunt Irene's lived, who took a few friends into her house, so that she could afford to stay there herself. Miss Morton was a gentle, refined woman of nearly sixty, who had never become used to being grown up, and was as shy as an old-fashioned girl of sixteen. She took a great fancy to Lesley, and manifested it by being a little stiffer with her than with other people, and doing all she could in an unobtrusive way to make her comfortable. The household consisted of the Carters, a young married pair who were blissfully sufficient to themselves, and two art students, Miss Grant and Miss Phipps, — one tall and serious, with more talent than conversation; the other small and

volatile, with more conversation than talent. The wish to economize had induced them to share a room, but there was no other bond between them. Lesley was made the confidante of all Miss Phipps's grievances, set forth at length, and before the winter was over she had gathered hints from Miss Grant as to her side of the case.

The circle was completed by Mr. Cameron, a business man, fair, cherubic, bald-headed, and as commonplace as his name was romantic. In a household almost wholly composed of women, he shone with unmerited lustre. He cherished a secret passion for Lesley, and an open one for Miss Phipps, and devoted himself to Miss Grant when the others were not present. He had amused Lesley at first, but the constancy he evinced for his old jokes made him tiresome as the winter progressed.

Meal times were not a source of unmixed delight to Lesley, for Miss Grant who, she suspected, would be interesting after a lifetime spent in getting at her, would seldom say anything, and the others chattered about trifles.

Lesley filled her time so full that she had little left for thought. Her bedroom at Miss Morton's had once been the back parlor and was large enough for her piano, so she took music lessons and tried to practice three hours a day. Her few Boston acquaintances were suffragists (she had become an active member of the association), and they were too busy to have much time to give her.

They pressed her to come to their meetings, and one woman, who was as charming as she was prominent, gave an afternoon tea for Lesley. Here she met a dozen other delightful women, most of them old enough to be her mother. Two of them called when she was out, and when she returned the visits they were not at home. There were other suffragists who were not charming, but who were leading the strenuous life with a persistency which Lesley felt would have awed President Roosevelt himself. The way in which these middle-aged ladies, who, Lesley divined, were in a less splendid social circle than her friend, made a kind of progress from one intellectual feast to another, filled her with amazement. In Renton, if one wanted to know something of Browning, or Maeterlinck, or Ibsen, one devoted an entire winter to the study of his works; but these ladies patiently went from a reading of Maeterlinck in the morning to a Browning club in the afternoon, sandwiching in a suffrage meeting, and they were fortunate if they did not end the day with a Lowell lecture. Lesley knew that there were all sorts of pleasant occasions for the initiated, little dinners, musicals, and dancing-parties. She longed to be one of the inner circle, for she could not be enthusiastic over the wealth of lectures that awaited her. She greatly enjoyed the Symphony Concerts, however, to which she went every week with Miss Morton. She was taken once to the Browning club, twice to French readings, and the suffrage meetings were always

with her. She was also asked to become a visitor in the Associated Charities, but she declined this honor.

Altogether, this was not the Boston of her dreams, but something of a Barmecide feast. Her few warm friends lived in the suburbs: she had a college classmate in Ashmont, another in Medford, and two in Jamaica Plain, and her expeditions to these outlying districts did not simplify her life.

The Winships and Marian Northbrook were comfortably settled in Cambridge, but Lesley felt it wiser for her to see as little of them as possible; for the moment she crossed their hospitable threshold she felt enveloped in the past, and so at home and happy that it made her life doubly unsatisfactory. Whenever she went to see them she gave a lively account of all she was doing, and of the new people she was meeting, and unintentionally hurt their feelings, for they thought she was becoming absorbed in her new friends and forgetting her old ones. Mrs. Winship wrote to her brother that she was disappointed in Lesley Chilton who was being spoiled by popularity. Mrs. Winship feared that Lesley had not yet become awake to the real issues of life, but it was natural for a young and fascinating woman to be engrossed by society.

And meanwhile the young and fascinating woman took her music lessons, and went to her suffrage meetings, and accepted her few invitations, trying to think that receptions in a city

where she was a stranger were a satisfying form of dissipation, and bravely ignoring the fact that her heart was hungry for affection. Occasionally Lesley went to the theatre ; Mr. Cameron was continually proposing theatre-parties on the Dutch treat plan, consisting of the entire household. He rang the changes on "We are Seven," until Lesley wished that Wordsworth had never written the poem ; or, as that was too much to ask, that their number might be reduced to six ; and then Mr. Cameron would do her some wholly unnecessary kindness which would make her ashamed of her intolerant judgment.

One day early in December, as she was getting ready for dinner and a Symphony Concert afterwards, a card was brought up to her.

"Oh, bother, I wish people would n't call so late," she said.

"It is a gentleman, Miss Chilton," the maid said. "I was n't sure whether you was out or in, and he said if you was out he 'd wait until you came in."

Then Lesley glanced at the card and read, "Mr. Henry Bowen Northbrook."

A moment before, the world had seemed filled with half-alive people hurrying about on trivial business which did not matter, and now it was full of intense interest. Yet she must not show Mr. Northbrook how glad she was to see him, for she was as far as ever from wishing to absorb her life in his.

When she reached the parlor, Miss Morton, flurried, but gradually thawing under Mr. Northbrook's friendly influence, was asking him to stay to dinner. Lesley paused in the doorway; suddenly, and for almost the first time in her life, knowing what it was to feel shy. She had felt she must not show Mr. Northbrook what pleasure she had in seeing him, and now she could not; something beyond her own control seemed to freeze her speech, and the words of welcome she would have uttered had she cared less for him, died on her lips. She did not say even the conventional, "I am very glad to see you," but instead, as she gave him her hand, observed, "This is a great surprise. I did not know you were coming to Boston."

"I did n't know it myself until this morning, when I found I could get away for Sunday. I wanted to see Marian."

"How is she?" Lesley asked, sitting down on the chair that was farthest from him.

He hesitated. "I am just on my way to Cambridge now. She does not know I am coming, I wanted to surprise her."

"I have been trying to persuade Mr. Northbrook to stay to dinner," said Miss Morton, "but of course I don't want to keep him from his daughter."

"Of course not," said Lesley.

Mr. Northbrook looked at her in a perplexed way. He had come all this distance because he was hungry for a sight of her, and here she sat as

far from him as she could get, cool, composed, indifferent, no longer the Lesley Chilton who belonged to him by all the rights of intimate understanding.

"I don't want to keep you from your dinner," he said politely.

"Dinner is n't ready yet," said Miss Morton.

The tall young art student came timidly into the room at this point, and finding a stranger there, was about to withdraw precipitately.

"Miss Grant, this is Mr. Northbrook, my friend Miss Northbrook's father," said Lesley. Marian had been there to dine several times.

Miss Grant sat down, looking as if she would like to say something if only she could think of something to say. Then Miss Phipps stopped in the doorway, and finding there was a stranger present, decided to come in. Lesley introduced her to Mr. Northbrook, and she took the seat next him and laid herself out to entertain him. She was very pretty, but had a harsh voice and an insipid mind. Lesley was angry with herself for having so mismanaged things, and with Mr. Northbrook for not cutting short his conversation with Miss Phipps.

When dinner was ready and they all rose, Miss Morton again timidly invited Mr. Northbrook to stay.

"I was wondering," he said to Lesley, "if you would not come out to my sister's with me to dine."

"There is a Symphony Concert this evening," she said.

"Is there? I should be sorry to make you lose that."

Miss Grant, with unexpected tact, asked Miss Phipps some question and detached her from Mr. Northbrook.

"You will stay to dinner, won't you?" said Lesley, with frigid politeness, as the others were leaving the parlor. "They will be through dinner by the time you get to Cambridge. They dine at six."

"Since you are so very pressing and cordial I will stay."

Lesley laughed in her old, light-hearted way.

"I shall make one condition," he went on, "and that is that I may be put between Miss Grant and Miss Phipps."

Mr. Cameron was dining out, so there really was a vacant place between the two art students, and Mr. Northbrook had to content himself with looking at Lesley across the table, and talking to her when Miss Phipps allowed it.

After dinner was over, Lesley, with feelings of extreme irritation, went to put on her wraps. So far Mr. Northbrook's coming had been only an aggravation.

"I will walk along with you, if I may," Mr. Northbrook said, as Miss Morton and Lesley came in.

After they reached the street, a stroke of un-

expected good fortune occurred. Miss Morton said, "I do so wish you felt you could give the time to going to the concert with Miss Chilton, Mr. Northbrook. It would be doing me a real kindness, for I am very tired to-night, as I went to a concert this afternoon. I should like to go to see a friend this evening, who is only in town for a short time, and if you and Miss Chilton will leave me at the Hotel Vendôme and call for me on your way back, I shall be glad; but if you don't feel you can give up the evening, tell me so frankly."

"I am afraid Mr. Northbrook feels he must go out to Cambridge," Lesley said.

He wondered whether that meant that she did not want to see him; but whatever she wanted, he was not going to let a chance of this kind slip, and he professed himself delighted to go to the concert.

They left Miss Morton at the Vendôme, and as they were passing the Public Library, Mr. Northbrook said he had never seen it at night and suggested going in there for a moment. They went up the marble staircase and tried the door that led to the balcony, but it was locked. Lesley sat down on the yellow marble seat on the left hand side of the stairway, and Mr. Northbrook took the seat opposite her.

"You can get a good view of the courtyard here," she said. "Isn't it beautiful? I always feel as if I were in some foreign city when I see

those slender columns shining out in the surrounding darkness. Is n't it like Italy?"

"Yes," Mr. Northbrook answered; and he added impulsively, "how I should like to show you Italy some day."

"Who knows but we may meet there," she said in a matter-of-fact tone, "Miss Morton has offered to take me."

Lesley glanced at the illuminated clock in the courtyard as she spoke. "It is ten minutes of eight," she said, "we shall be late at the concert."

He looked at her as if trying to read her thoughts. "I don't understand you," he said at last. "You have always been so frank with me. I thought you wanted to be friends. When you said the other was impossible, you told me you wished to keep my friendship, that we could be truer friends than men and women can often be; and now I have come here to see you and you treat me less kindly than if I were a mere acquaintance. There has not been an hour since I said good-by to you that life has not seemed to have lost its savor, yet you meet me as if I were an unwelcome interruption to your evening; and now that I at last have the chance of saying a few words to you alone, you tell me we shall be late at the concert. What has meant new life to me has evidently been nothing but an agreeable way of passing the time to you. May I ask what your idea of friendship is?"

She did not answer at first, and again he looked steadily at her. Her beauty had never struck him so forcibly, as she sat there with her dark red evening cloak a little thrown back, and a black lace scarf on her head which gave a Spanish look to her face with its bright color and her dark hair and eyes. But while he felt her beauty, her charm had curiously diminished with the departure of her cordial frankness.

"What is my definition of a friend?" she asked, looking down and fingering the fur on the edge of her cloak. "There are different kinds of friends; in general one means nothing more than a kindly disposed person who likes one and whom one likes. I suppose we all of us have dozens of such friends."

"Was this all you meant when I saw you last?"

"No." She rose as she spoke. "We really must be going."

"May I ask why you have changed your mind?" he inquired, as they turned their steps towards Symphony Hall.

"Why do you think I have changed my mind?"

"I don't understand you," he said again. "I suppose," he continued presently, "that you have been making new friends this winter and have waked up to the fact that there are dozens of younger and more attractive men, who, even in the matter of friendship, can give you what I cannot."

Lesley was again conscious of a mad wish to

escape. The charm of his presence was as great as ever, and she perceived that whenever she saw him she would have to make her fight all over again. She could not be as frank as he was; for to own how well she liked him would be to admit the possibility that she might some time be prevailed upon to be more than a friend.

"I wish we could go back and begin over again," she said. "I like things the way they were the first summer I knew you."

"And you would like to go back? But that seems now like such a shallow kind of surface friendship."

"Perhaps I am a shallow surface person."

"You are very young," he said, and the words brought back the morning when they walked along the beach at Atlantic City. "You may be shallow and on the surface for a time. Perhaps you may never feel differently towards me, but some day you will see life in its true proportions, and then you will remember what I have said now."

She was silent. As he spoke, she had a glimpse of depth beneath depth and height above height of feeling beyond all she had ever known. If she were to listen to him and let herself be swept away into these unexplored regions, what would life mean to her? Renunciation of self. The giving up of freedom and of the easy, pleasant roads along which one could travel with half-closed eyes. No, no, no, a thousand times no! She would not relinquish her hard-fought victory and

give up her independence. Her life had been very happy before she knew him; she would make it happy without him. She turned the conversation into commonplace channels, and by the time they reached Symphony Hall she had herself well in check. They waited behind closed doors until the overture was finished, and then entered with the other late-comers. They were a conspicuous pair, as they crossed the hall, and many eyes followed them.

Lesley had never been to a concert before with Mr. Northbrook, and afterwards she looked back to that evening as the high-water mark of enjoyment, for he cared for the music in just the way that she did. When the intermission came, she turned to him and said, "Shall we go out and walk in the vestibule? I usually do. It gives one a chance to see one's friends."

"Then for heaven's sake let us stay where we are."

"Marian, where did you come from?"

Her father gave her a self-conscious and somewhat guilty glance as he returned her affectionate handshake. It was the first time in all her life that he had not been glad to see her.

"Aunt Madeline and I had tickets sent us at the last minute. Our seats are in the first balcony. But father, where did you come from? I never was more surprised than when I saw you coming in with Miss Lesley."

"I found I could get off, and I felt I must come on and see how things were going with you, little girl. I stopped on my way to see if I could n't persuade Miss Chilton to go out to Cambridge with me, and Miss Morton urged me to take her ticket to the concert."

The explanation sounded transparently lame to his own ears, but it seemed to satisfy Marian.

"And now," said Lesley, "I am going up to sit with Mrs. Winship. I have been feeling guilty all the evening because I have been keeping your father from you."

The last half of the programme was not so satisfactory as the first half. Lesley thought the orchestra did not play Beethoven's Second Symphony with its usual spirit.

XXV

WITHOUT COMPROMISE

MR. NORTHBROOK was coming to Cambridge to spend the Saturday and Sunday before Christmas, and to take his daughter home with him for her vacation, and Mrs. Winship asked Lesley to pass Sunday with them. She invited her a fortnight before the time, so as to be sure to secure her, and it was peculiarly trying, after Lesley had accepted, to have her write at the last minute to say she had decided to go to Renton on Saturday instead of Monday.

"I have a disappointment for you, Henry," Mrs. Winship told her brother; and she added,—in as unconcerned a way as if she were saying, "We are not going to have ice cream for dessert,"—"Lesley is n't coming here to-morrow; she has gone to Renton."

"Well, I imagine I can bear up if she can," he returned quietly.

"How ungallant of you! I thought you were such good friends."

"We are, when she has not anything better to do."

"Henry, I don't think you are fair to her," said Mrs. Winship, who had been thinking the same thing all winter about Lesley and themselves.

Mr. Northbrook was devoutly thankful his sister had not the faintest suspicion of the nature of his interest in Lesley. And in addition to his disappointment at not seeing her was the misery of knowing that her absence must be because of his presence, for his sister told him Lesley gave no reason for her sudden change of plans, but said she would spend a Sunday with them later while Marian was away.

Marian was quick to feel that her father was not in his usual spirits, as she wandered about in the woods with him at Arlington Heights on Sunday morning. She slipped her arm through his and said, "Dear father, it is such a joy to have you all to myself."

"Marian, dear, I am glad you feel so. There is certainly no one I would rather be with than you."

"How Miss Lesley would like this view," Marian said a little later, as they stood on the hilltop looking at the city below them in its haze of smoke. "Do you know, father, Miss Lesley seems different this winter. Of course, she is very busy, and so am I; but when she does come to us, or when I go to her, and I want to begin where we left off, there is a constraint on her side. She always talks about little things that do not matter, and she used to talk about big things, — life, and how to make the most of it, and friendship, — glorious things, father, that made you glad you were in the world. I have never seen any-

one so dear and charming, and so I keep wondering if it can be my fault."

"I feel that way, too, myself," her father owned, "but I don't believe it is our fault. I think she is charming just from gladness of heart; and that she only cares seriously for a few people, and the rest of us have misunderstood her, and taken what is merely like the desire of a child to play with other children for something more."

"Dear father," said Marian, giving him a quick, impulsive kiss. She did not know what was in his mind, but she felt that he, too, was sore and disappointed.

"After all, it doesn't matter since we have each other, does it, father?" she asked. "I have often wondered whether there can be anything in life so good as the love of a father for a daughter. I am sure there cannot be, for it is as steadfast as the sun. Other people love us less, or go away, or are disappointed in us, but our father only loves us more if things go hard. And it lasts a whole lifetime. A lover would only love one after one was a grown woman, and his feeling might change. And one can tell a father everything. Yes, I have felt very unhappy about Miss Lesley, but I have you; that ought to be enough."

"And I have you," he said.

Nevertheless they both felt a longing for the sunshine of Lesley's temperament. The world seemed bare and a little sad in its winter beauty; and life, that had so unexpectedly blossomed for them, had suddenly grown monotonous.

"I suppose she is having a delightful time with the Washburns and their baby," said Marian presently. "And that Mr. Hart; I liked him. He seemed a kind, restful person. But, oh, father, you don't think she could really care for him, do you? She is so brilliant, and he is so commonplace."

"I don't know, Marian. When it comes to those matters, it is impossible to predict what any woman will do."

"Of course he loves her tremendously, and that must always count with a woman," Marian said.

"It would count less with her than with most women. Her idea of life is to have as much enjoyment as possible."

"Oh, no, father, she is very eager to do some work in the world."

"Is she? She is not on the road to it. She has absolute freedom this winter, and she is frittering away her time. She is trying to amuse herself, and I hope she will succeed; but I am afraid she will defeat her end. Marian, Happiness does not often come to us, and she is so shy she flies from us when we pursue her. But sometimes, on a day like this, when we two have come out together, both a little sore at heart, with no thought of worldly pleasure, but merely for the comfort of being together, we catch a glimpse of Happiness. Look down that wood-path where the ferns are shriveled and white and the dead leaves are lying on the ground, and see the glancing sunlight. Do you not see Happiness standing there

with her face turned away from us? We did not seek her, but she has come to us. It is a strange world," he added under his breath.

That evening Mr. Northbrook asked Marian to sing to him. She had a sweet, untrained contralto voice that was full of feeling.

She sang one simple old-fashioned song after another, and finally her uncle asked for Bonnie Lesley.

She gave it with much spirit.

"Oh, saw ye Bonnie Lesley,
As she gaed o'er the border?
She 's gane like Alexander,
To spread her conquests farther.
To see her is to love her,
And love but her forever,
For nature made her what she is,
And never made anither!"

When she had sung all three verses, her uncle said, "I should think Burns had written that for our Lesley. 'Return again, fair Lesley,'" he sang in an execrable bass. "She ought to be here to play your accompaniments, Marian."

"I wish she were."

"She 's gane like Alexander,
To spread her conquests farther," —

he hummed. "I can't imagine what the young men are thinking about to let her stay unmarried."

"I fancy the fault is with her, Uncle Henry, and not with the young men," Marian said, turning half around on the piano stool.

"No, the fault is with them. If any spirited

young man who was worth his salt were to come along he 'd get her. They are all too much afraid of displeasing her. When she says she doesn't love them, they believe her. It is the young Lochinvar sort of business that always takes with that kind of girl. But the young men nowadays are a tame lot."

"Miss Lesley Chilton is a young woman who likes her freedom, and who knows her own mind," Mr. Northbrook said. "Mrs. Lochinvar was not a suffragist."

Lesley meanwhile was saying to herself that she was glad she had escaped to Renton, and was trying to fancy that the dear old friends and the peaceful ways of life were what she wanted most. It was a delight to see Amy and the baby again, and Lesley said more than once, "This is living. I know I shall end my days in the country. One is of some consequence here. In the city, I am only one snowflake in a snowstorm."

On Sunday morning, while Marian and her father were walking together, Lesley was in church trying to listen to the sermon, and in the afternoon she took a long walk through the woods and pastures with the Washburns and Nathan Hart. It seemed so good to be at home that she could almost fancy herself settling down there forever. "Perhaps, if I had never known Mr. Northbrook, I might sometime have been so touched by Nathan's affection as to have married him," she thought, with a little shiver. Now she knew that

could never be. Her friendship with Mr. Northbrook had taught her the possibilities of life. She was young, there were years and years ahead of her. Some time she might know a man with Henry Northbrook's power to touch her heart, joined to Nathan's enlightened views and unselfish desire to let her have all she wanted most. Some time life would give her what she asked. It merely needed a brave heart and patience; for was she not born to be on the top of the wave? Most women, she reflected, spoil their lives. Despairing of getting the best things, they make compromises through hunger for human affection, weakness, passion, sometimes even from mistaken self-sacrifice. She would make no compromise. With her eyes fixed on her ideal of what a woman's freedom should be, she would walk steadily onward, neither looking to the right hand nor the left, sure that in good time she should see the work in the world that she was best fitted to do, glad if she might meet a kindred soul who would share all her ideals and views, but not unhappy if it should happen that she must tread her path in life alone.

It was a comfort to see Mrs. Madison and get strengthened in all her ideas. Here in Renton, the cause of woman suffrage seemed so much more personal than it did in Boston.

Lesley spent an afternoon with Mrs. Madison in the dear old green parlor, with the carpet a little more faded and the table piled a little higher with evidences of the tastes of the family.

Here, with her hand in that of her old friend, she poured out her story of the winter, omitting nothing except Mr. Northbrook. And so, knowing only the outer edges of the girl's mind, Mrs. Madison had no idea of the storm and stress she had been through.

"My dear child, what you want is an engrossing occupation," she told her. "If you throw yourself heart and soul into the suffrage cause, without any thought of personal enjoyment, you will have the larger vision of life, and be happy in the wider sense."

"Sometimes," Lesley confessed, "it all seems so futile, — the meetings and all the rest of it. I am afraid I am not a large person. I often long for pure fun, — a girl's good time of the most worldly kind, — and then again I long for some true friend like Amy; and sometimes I want to do work where I can see the results at once. I envy the women who are artists or authors, and I even envy teachers and trained nurses, for they are doing something that counts."

"My dear, to work for woman suffrage is greater than all the rest, for the greater includes the less. If we can have suffrage, the world will be reconstructed; and with other laws and other standards of life, much of the misery and sin we have now will disappear. Does it not seem to you worth while to give your best years to helping on this great reform?"

"Yes," said Lesley, a little doubtfully, "if I could only live to see it come."

"Never mind whether you see it come or not. Give up hoping to have a gay winter. Fling yourself heart and soul into this great cause. We women need all the courage, all the conviction of soldiers proud to be in an organized army, eager to carry through the greatest reform of the twentieth century. If we falter and grow faint-hearted, if we stop to think whether we like to do things, if we ask whether the reform will come in our own day, we cannot do good work. It needs the enthusiasm of unquestioning faith to accomplish our end."

And so Lesley went back to her life in Boston, strengthened in her convictions, and she worked more earnestly for the suffrage movement. But there was still a hungry feeling in her heart; and sometimes, in the watches of the night, she owned to herself that persons were and ever would be more to her than causes. She even wondered whether she had been wise in going to Renton to avoid seeing Mr. Northbrook, for she believed it was harder not to think about him now than if she had seen him then. And once, when she was very tired and depressed, she asked herself whether the women who made compromises were not the happiest.

XXVI

A BELATED CALL

As the winter passed, Lesley's acquaintances grew in number, and she even came to know half a dozen girls of her own age. They liked her, and were kind to her in their way. They called on her, and one of them asked her to a little tea, and another to a lunch party of eight girls, where they all talked very fast about persons whom she did not know. Another girl asked her to a family dinner with Miss Grant and a young man, who appeared to be the useful sort of relative who could be counted upon for all the less brilliant social events. Lesley knew that this girl often gave dinners to persons in the fashionable world, and she felt a little piqued and cynical when she reflected that she was considered too unconventional to be received in the charmed circle. These new acquaintances helped to occupy Lesley's time, but they did not fill her heart. And so the winter passed, and February came.

Lesley had not been to see the Winships for a long time. One day she received a note from Mrs. Winship, saying that she had a cold and needed to be cheered, and asking if Lesley would not lunch with her on the following Tuesday. Lesley had an engagement of long standing for a

luncheon on Tuesday, so wrote that she would go to see Mrs. Winship very soon; but nearly a week had passed, so crowded with business and pleasure that Lesley could not make time to go to Cambridge.

"I must manage to get there to-morrow," she said to herself day after day. She was very tired, physically and mentally, and she knew that nothing would rest her so much as a few quiet hours with Mrs. Winship. It would be next best to a talk with Amy. Dear Amy, how she longed to see her and to take the baby in her arms! She wanted a sleigh-ride over the country hills and through the snow-crusted woods. She longed intensely for her Aunt Irene. If she could only put her arms around her neck, and rest her weary head on her shoulder, whispering to her all that was in her heart, life would be worth while once more. It hardly seemed of any value when there was no one to whom she was of vital importance. What would her aunt say to her if she were to tell her truly the history of the last two years? Her dear voice seemed to come back to her from the past.

"It is better to be tied by love than to be free without it."

That was the view of an old-fashioned woman of the clinging type. There was a certain truth in it; but how much better it would be to love some one who could give one freedom too.

Lesley let herself in at Miss Morton's door with her latch-key, glancing at her watch, and noticing

there was still half an hour before dinner. She looked in at the parlor door. The Carters were sitting hand in hand on the sofa. They moved apart when they saw her and asked her to come in. The sight of them gave her a pang of envy. How little they minded whether life were hard or easy, since it was shared! She went up to her room, carrying some circulars and notes that had accumulated for her on the hall table. They were none of them of interest, except one from Florence Hallett which she saved until the last. Florence always wrote a bright, amusing letter. Lesley had nearly finished it when she came upon this sentence:—

“Have you heard the report that Henry Northbrook is going to marry my cousin, Emma Ward? Emma has been summoned home twice lately by her mother, and ‘they say’ Mr. Northbrook wants to have things arranged on a more permanent basis. It would be a sensible plan, for the children are all fond of her.

“Henry Northbrook and Emma Ward! It is an extraordinary combination, but the more I think of it, the less impossible it seems. She is four or five years older than he, but she is young in her character, and shares all his old-fashioned views. She is at home now, so I have not seen her since I heard the rumor, and I don’t like to write to Renton for fear of stirring up a hornet’s nest if it is n’t true. Of course you will know, on account of your intimacy with the Winships.”

As Lesley finished reading her letter she heard the musical sound of the Japanese gongs summoning the household to dinner, and Miss Phipps's shrill laugh was answered by the bass laugh of Mr. Cameron. It all seemed a far-away, unreal world. The only real thing was her feeling for Mr. Northbrook. The winter had been of as little importance as a play on the stage. This news could not be true. Her whole nature protested against it. It could not be possible that a man who was capable of the deepest feeling would be content to make a compromise of his life. And yet when she thought of the decided way in which she had thrust his love from her, she was obliged to admit the torturing possibility that the news might be true. She knew his was a character guided largely by impulse, and it might be that after feeling he could never win her he had turned, in the revulsion of wounded affection, to Emma Ward, whom his judgment would approve. Lesley asked herself how she ever could have been so misguided as to contemplate for a single moment the idea of shutting Mr. Northbrook out of her life, and so make it possible for a thing like this to happen. It could not be true, but if it were, — well, if it were true, there was nothing left in life that was of any value. She might as well face this fact in all the baldness of its misery. And she had only herself to blame. But no, if he, on his side, had been steadfast, he could have won her in time. She did not think now of her

insuperable objections to their marriage. Her heart cried out for him as passionately as if she were a primitive woman free from all enlightened views. When she had refused to take his love, it had never once occurred to her that he might marry some one else. She had an acute sense of jealousy, even in thinking of another woman being a mother to Marian and the boys and little Charlotte. And how would it be for Mr. Northbrook? Miss Ward would keep his house well, and free him from trivial perplexities, but could he ever have a vivid enjoyment of life with her? Whatever Emma Ward's virtues might be, she could never make him feel that he was living in fairyland.

Lesley could not bear this suspense. She would go to Cambridge at once, and find out from Mrs. Winship if this rumor were true. But no, pride forbade her appearing at the Winships' in the evening and demanding if Mr. Northbrook were engaged to Emma Ward.

The next morning Mr. Cameron joked with Lesley at the breakfast table about "We are Seven," for the entire household was going to the theatre that evening, and Miss Morton asked her what her engagements were for the day. It was evident to Lesley that she showed no traces of having spent a wakeful night. She remembered having once heard that Miss Morton had been engaged, and that her lover had been killed in the Civil War. How could women live through such

things and go on quietly ordering breakfasts and dinners and talking about trifles? Was triviality merely a mask to hide deep feeling? She herself had never joked more lightly than she did this morning. If others who joked as lightly felt as she did, Heaven help them!

Lesley's morning was full of engagements which she could not break without great inconvenience to others, and so she had to postpone going to Cambridge until the afternoon. She meant to get there early, but a visitor on business connected with an equal suffrage meeting waylaid her just as she was leaving the house. She was so late in starting that she decided to dine at the Winships' and join Miss Morton and the others at the theatre. Marian herself opened the door.

"I am so glad to see you," the girl said. "We have been having a dreadful time for a week. Everything has happened all at once. Aunt Madeline has the grippe, and Uncle Henry has a bad cough; but worst of all, the cook has gone home to her sick mother, so I have been nurse and cook and housemaid, for the housemaid is n't very strong, and she does n't know much about cooking."

"And you are an experienced Samson," Lesley said. "My dear child, why did n't you let me know what was going on?"

"Did n't you get a note from Aunt Madeline?"

"Yes, but she only said she had a cold, and I

was in an avalanche of engagements, but I would have broken them all cheerfully if I had known anything serious was the matter. You have a bad cold yourself," she added.

"Yes, it has gone through the family. Perhaps you had better not see Aunt Madeline, if you are afraid of the grippe."

"I am not in the least afraid of it."

"Aunt Madeline has had a high fever. Her temperature was a hundred and two for three nights, but it has come down to a hundred now. I have learned to take temperatures," Marian announced with pride. "The doctor said I was a very good nurse."

"I have no doubt you are a fine one, but it is too much of a strain for you to be tied down in this way. I suppose you have had to give up your lessons?"

"Yes, I have n't been to college for nearly a week."

Lesley found Mrs. Winship propped up in bed, and with flushed cheeks. She was playing a game of the inevitable halma with her husband. They were both delighted to see Lesley.

"I have just beaten Madeline two games out of three," Mr. Winship said. "The last game was most exciting," he informed her, and he began a description of it.

Would he never stop talking? Was all of life a game played on a large scale, and had one as little power as a man on a halma board? A quo-

tation from Omar Khayyám flashed into Lesley's mind :—

“ But helpless pieces of the Game he plays,
Upon this checker-board of nights and days.”

Mrs. Winship put out a hot hand to Lesley.

“I won't kiss you, dear,” she said, “for fear I might give you the grippe, although I am so much better I don't believe there is any danger. Poor Mr. Winship has had a very lonely time since I have been ill. This is the first night I have been able to play with him. And now he has taken cold.”

“I have a bad cough,” Mr. Winship said, with a touch of pride, as if this circumstance dignified his humdrum life. “In addition to my chronic ailments, it is not cheering.” He dilated on his symptoms. “Have you ever taken lettuce lozenges when you have had a cough, Miss Chilton?” he asked finally. “They are very pleasant and quite soothing. Let me offer you a lettuce lozenge. It is a French preparation. Do try one. No? Take one to please me. They are like candy. Madeline, it is your turn. Excuse me, Miss Lesley, we are at a critical point of the game, but we have almost finished.”

Lesley could hardly control her impatience, but the color signals in Mrs. Winship's face warned her, if they did not warn Mr. Winship, and she slipped out of the room, wondering how he could be so selfish. She decided that she must not speak to Mrs. Winship of Florence's letter. Per-

haps she would not have had the courage to do it in any event. She joined Marian, who with the nervous energy of the over-tired, was making a quite unnecessary mayonnaise salad-dressing for dinner. Lesley took the vinegar cruet out of Marian's hand, and tied her checked apron around her own waist.

"First I am going to tuck you up on the sofa in the library, dear, and then I shall make the salad-dressing. I will call you when dinner is ready."

Marian was too near the end of her strength to do more than gently protest. As she lay on the sofa, it was like heaven to have Lesley bending over her. She seemed so strong and cheerful and competent. The heavy weight of a week of anxiety slipped from Marian's shoulders.

"I have such a delightful plan," said Lesley, coming to the open door between the two rooms with the salad spoon in her hand, "I am going to telephone to-night to Amy Washburn to ask her to send Martha here. Martha has been taking a rest this winter. I shall feel wholly at ease about you all with her here. She is a fine cook and an excellent nurse."

When Lesley summoned Marian to dinner, she said she must take her aunt's temperature first, and carry her some broth, but Lesley bade her stay where she was. She took the broth up herself to Mrs. Winship, who was lying with closed eyes and a look of complete exhaustion. Her

temperature was a little higher than it had been the night before. Mr. Winship was coughing badly. He asked Lesley to take his temperature, and was injured to find it was exactly normal.

"This thermometer business is very misleading," he said. "I feel as if I were in a high fever. Are you sure, Miss Lesley, that you are not making things out better than they are to quiet my fears?"

Lesley showed him the thermometer.

"While I am taking temperatures, I am going to take yours," she said to Marian. She was startled to find her temperature was a hundred and two.

"Suppose you stay here and let me bring you some of your Aunt Madeline's broth?" she said.

"Have I any fever?"

"You are a little feverish, as one often is with a heavy cold, and I am sure you will be more comfortable if you don't try to sit up to dinner."

That was the dreariest meal Lesley had ever taken in the Winships' house. She tried to be more lively than usual to cheer Mr. Winship, but all the time her mind was flying back to Mr. Northbrook in New York, and then turning to Marian. Once she ventured to ask Mr. Winship if they had good news from the Northbrooks, and he said he believed so, Marian had not had a letter from her father for more than a week. Henry never was a good correspondent, and now that Miss Ward was there, he wrote less than ever, for she sent Marian frequent bulletins.

"Miss Ward is in Renton now, isn't she?" Lesley asked, and he replied that he believed so. It was evident that he had heard no exciting news. But was it not possible that Mr. Northbrook's long silence came from lack of courage to break the announcement of his engagement to his family?

When dinner was over, Lesley could not bear to leave her friends in their forlorn condition. Marian was hardly equal to getting herself ready for bed, to say nothing of helping her aunt, and Mr. Winship had been waited on too long to be of any service to his wife. The frightened little maid, who was sure of getting the grippe if she went near her mistress, was absolutely useless in the sick room. Lesley felt there was nothing to do but to give up the theatre and spend the night with the Winships. She decided to telephone to Miss Morton that she could not join the party. At the same time she would telephone to Amy and get her to send Martha down on the morning train. Mr. Winship did not know whether any of their neighbors had a telephone; he himself had a prejudice against them, and always telegraphed. Marian said the nearest public telephone was in a drug-store half a mile away.

"Never mind," said Lesley, nothing daunted, "there must be plenty of houses with telephones on this street. I'll ring the door-bells until I find one."

"You are not going to strange houses?" Marian asked, with wide-open eyes.

"Why not?" said Lesley, with the happy confidence of the woman who always pleases at first sight, and has never had to consider the possibility of meeting with a rebuff.

Lesley's love of the unusual gave a certain piquancy to her quest, and when she came back half an hour later, her shining eyes and smiling mouth betokened success.

"Did you have to go to the public telephone, after all?" Marian inquired. "You were gone so long I fancied you did."

"No indeed. The world is full of good, kind people. I went to the Browns first."

"Who are they? How did you know them?"

"I did n't. I picked out a large, prosperous looking house, where I was sure there was a telephone. 'Brown' was on the doorplate, and I explained my errand to the sympathetic maid. The parlor opened into the hall, and a lady heard my voice and sent out her son to escort me to Mrs. Frazer's, where they have a telephone. We are now lifelong friends. I suspect it was love at first sight on his side as well as mine. He has three younger brothers, and a sister. He has even told me his name. It is George; but alas for romance, he is only fourteen!"

"You are the most wonderful person!" said Marian. "We have lived here all winter, and I only know two families on the street."

"Mrs. Frazer is a dear person about your aunt's age. She was most interested, and is going to

call on her soon. I had to wait twenty minutes before I could get Amy, which is why I was so long; but it is all right, she will send Martha down to-morrow. Now I am going to help you to bed, little girl."

Marian grasped Lesley's hand. "I wish you were going to stay here the rest of the winter. I wish you were going to stay with me all my life. I never knew any one like you. Now you have come, I feel sure everything will go right."

"If I had been a really good friend, I should have come a week ago," said Lesley.

XXVII

IN THE SHADOW

"MISS NORTHBROOK must stay in bed for a few days and have the best of care," said the doctor. He was a kindly, white-haired man of sixty, with a sympathetic manner.

"I have sent for an old servant of mine, who is an excellent cook and a good nurse," said Lesley. "She will be here this afternoon."

"I wish they would have a trained nurse," the doctor said. "Miss Northbrook will have to be very carefully watched for a day or two. I am a little afraid of pneumonia, although I hope it may blow over. I tried to persuade them to get a nurse for Mrs. Winship, but they have a great prejudice against nurses."

"Yes," said Lesley, "but that need n't make any difference. If you think Miss Northbrook ought to have a nurse, please send one here at once. I will take the responsibility."

The doctor looked with new interest at this young lady who so calmly proposed riding over all the obstacles that hedged him in.

"Are you a relative of the family?" he asked.

"No, only a friend."

"Mr. Winship seemed very decided against a nurse. Perhaps, if your cook is a good nurse, —

"I don't want to involve them in unnecessary expense."

"If she were your own daughter, should you have a trained nurse for her?"

"Certainly."

"Then please get one as soon as you can. Miss Northbrook has always been delicate, and she ought to be given every advantage."

When the doctor had gone, Lesley said to Mr. Winship, "There is something you will not like to hear that I must tell you, for I want your help."

Mr. Winship was not used to meeting responsibilities. For years all the disagreeable things in life had been softened for him. He looked at Lesley reproachfully.

"I didn't sleep well last night," he began.

"No, I should hardly think you could. I am sorry to have to worry you, but the doctor says Marian may have pneumonia, and that we ought to have a trained nurse. I have told him to get one, and I want you to help me keep the knowledge of Marian's danger from your wife, and make everything as easy as possible for the nurse. She is coming to-day."

Mr. Winship looked in hostile silence at Lesley. "We have never had a trained nurse in all the years of my illness," he said at last. "I have a prejudice against them, and so has my wife."

"It is very lucky Marian has n't," said Lesley.

"Poor little girl, she must not have pneumonia."

That is too hard. Mrs. Winship will die of anxiety, and I myself, a broken man " —

"You yourself will have a chance to show what a man can be. You must keep up all our spirits."

"It is you who will do that, Miss Lesley. I beg you to make our house your home until the invalids get well," he said, rising to the occasion; "we cannot do without you."

That night as Lesley rested her tired head on her pillow, it was with a feeling of gratitude that things were no worse. Martha had come, and she was a tower of strength; and the nurse had come, and Marian liked her. Every moment had been full, and Lesley had had little time to think of Mr. Northbrook's possible engagement. It seemed like a bad dream, which she would shut away from her like any other nightmare. She had concluded there could not be anything in the story, or she would have heard of it from other quarters. And meanwhile, although she was anxious about Marian, it was so good to be with her friends and to feel herself of use, that a curious kind of content came to her that made her less dissatisfied than she had been all winter. She felt she was living at last.

It was not an exciting existence for a young woman who had come to Boston with such exalted plans of helping the human race, and incidentally having a brilliant winter in society, she acknowledged with a little smile. Three hours a day were given to playing halma with Mr. Winship

and reading to him, and she was occupied with Mrs. Winship three hours more, while the rest of the time there were errands to be done and Marian to be visited. Lesley had to give up the many engagements which had seemed so important once but were so secondary now. A week ago, Lesley reflected, she had been vexed because she had been invited to a family dinner instead of a fashionable one. Now she would be grateful if Marian did not have pneumonia. One's perspective changes in life.

The peaceful days were soon over, for by Saturday morning the doctor announced with a grave face that his patient had pneumonia.

"She must not be told it," he added, "and you had better keep it from her aunt. Miss Northbrook is not critically ill at present. We hope it will be a light attack."

"Ought we to send word to her father that she has pneumonia?" Lesley asked. "Mr. Winship has written to him every day since I came. Marian says her father is made nearly frantic with anxiety whenever there is anything the matter with her, and she asked her uncle to make as light of the attack as possible."

"I never saw such wonderful strength of mind and unselfishness in so young a girl," said the doctor. "She was an excellent nurse. Her faithfulness and serenity deceived me as to her strength. She seems to long to see her father, but she does not want him alarmed. Under the

circumstances, I would not say anything about her having pneumonia. She will probably stay as she is for a few days. If she is worse, we can telegraph."

The next morning, Lesley received this dispatch from Mr. Northbrook: —

"Telegraph exactly how Marian is. Get trained nurse. Spare no expense."

She sent the following message: —

"Marian not critically ill. Have excellent nurse. Will write."

Lesley wrote a full account of Marian's illness, and an answer came, in the form of a telegram, saying that Mr. Northbrook would be with them Wednesday evening. Almost as soon as Lesley had sent her letter, Marian became much worse. Lesley had been on the point of sending Mr. Northbrook a telegram when his had come.

Heretofore Lesley had been able to keep up her outward cheerfulness, for the sake of the others, but the strain was beginning to tell on her, and the thought of Mr. Northbrook's anxiety weighed on her more and more as he came nearer and nearer. There were two nurses now, and Lesley moved herself and her belongings down the street to make room for Mr. Northbrook, for Mrs. Fraser had kindly offered to shelter her at night.

Mr. Northbrook was coming on the two o'clock flyer, and would reach Cambridge Wednesday evening a little before eight o'clock.

Wednesday was an interminable day. The

doctor came three times, and at each visit he looked graver.

"You don't think, do you," Lesley said, following him to the door as he left the house at six o'clock, "that there is any great danger? That she will not — pull through?"

"My dear Miss Chilton, I wish you would not ask me that question; we must hope for the best" — he noticed the change in Lesley's face — "there is an even chance. The crisis will not come for two or three days. We must do all we can to keep up her strength. Why, Miss Chilton" — he caught Lesley's arm as she swayed unsteadily — "I did not realize — you are always so calm" —

"It is nothing," said Lesley, bravely dashing back her tears. "You need n't be sorry you told me, I shan't give way again. I realize that we must all keep up our courage for her sake."

As Lesley and her host were sitting together waiting for Mr. Northbrook's arrival, Mr. Winship put down his paper. "You think Marian is going on all right, don't you?" he asked, suddenly fixing Lesley with his penetrating glance.

"Marian is very ill," she said slowly. "But she has the best of care, we must hope" —

"I knew it," he said, getting up and nervously walking about the room. "That white gowned nurse could n't deceive me. The breezy black and white checked one would n't have arrived in the middle of the night, and have been sitting in the hall, if things were going all right. I stepped out

for a moment to hear if all was going well, and there the young lady sat as cheerful as if she were at a dancing party, waiting for her turn to waltz.

“ ‘ Who are you ? ’ said I.

“ ‘ I ’m the night nurse,’ said she. ‘ I have come to help the other nurse, who is getting tired. I suppose you are Mr. Winship,’ she added, as unconcerned as if I ’d been in full evening dress. And then the white one came out, and the black and white check went in, and the white one said I mustn’t worry, that the other was a friend who had come to help her out, and that my niece was having a comfortable night. She said that now they could give Mrs. Winship more attention. We were a great deal better off before these nurses came. You don’t think it meant that Madeline is worse ? ”

“ No indeed. Mrs. Winship is getting on as well as she can. I fancy we shall be allowed to spend the evening with her very soon.”

“ It is all a great strain on me,” Mr. Winship said, growing more and more restless. “ Miss Lesley, I feel that I must have some halma to quiet my nerves.”

“ I am afraid Mr. Northbrook would think it very strange if he were to find us playing halma when he came,” Lesley said, glancing at the clock.

“ I can’t help that. I must have something to take up my mind. Miss Lesley, I know you think me very unfeeling, but the fact is I love that dear

child so that I can't let myself think of what will happen if — shocks are very bad for me — Madeline has always kept all care from me before — my nerves — I know I am selfish" —

Lesley felt a rush of sudden tears. Mr. Winship had never seemed so pathetically human to her as he did now, stripped at last in his own eyes of all the decent draperies that had hitherto shrouded his egotism, and yet dignified in her eyes by the ennobling power of real emotion.

She impulsively pressed his hand. "You and I must keep our spirits up," she said. "I'll get the halma-board."

They were playing halma when Mr. Northbrook came. He was pale, and looked worn and anxious.

"You are having a game of halma," he said, with an effort at cheerfulness. "I feel that is a good omen. Marian must be better."

Mr. Winship's eyes met Lesley's for one hesitating second.

"She is n't better. Tell me the truth," Mr. Northbrook demanded, with unaccustomed brusqueness.

"She is n't quite so well to-day," Lesley said gently. "The doctor is anxious but hopeful," she added hurriedly.

"Anxious but hopeful. You mean there is very little hope?"

"I did n't say that."

"Can I see her?"

"I will speak to the nurse. I am not allowed to see Marian now."

Mr. Northbrook was waiting in the hall when Lesley came down. Lesley was very pale.

"How is she?" he asked huskily.

"She is comfortable at present, but the nurse is afraid to have her know you are here to-night, for fear it might excite her. She says you may look at her through the open door."

"Has it come to that?" he asked. "Don't deceive me. You have never deceived me in anything. Do they think there is a chance for her?"

"An even chance," she said.

For an interminable moment, Lesley dropped her eyes, not daring to meet the anguish in his; then she heard him go unsteadily up the stairs. She sank down on the window seat and buried her face in her hands. She must not lose her self-command, for she was the one person in the house who could help him now. A vision of life more utterly desolate than anything she had ever known came over her, when she thought of what it would be to him if he were to lose his daughter. Her own wishes, her own happiness, nothing seemed of any importance, if only Marian's life might be saved. Lesley was still struggling for self-possession when she heard Mr. Northbrook's step on the stair. With a great effort she looked up at him, trying to smile.

He came and sat down by her. "Why did n't you send for me before?" he asked almost roughly.

His tone hurt her cruelly.

"Because Marian did n't wish it."

"That made no difference. Perhaps if I had been here earlier — it is too late now. Her eyes have the look her mother's had."

Mr. Winship, flurried, nervous, and inexpressibly anxious, came to the parlor door. "Is she worse? What is the matter? Why did you leave me so long?"

Lesley looked from one to the other in pitying silence.

"Mr. Northbrook, you must try, for Marian's sake, to be brave. If you can keep cheerful, they will let you see her to-morrow, and you can help her more than any one, for she loves you best. I am going to finish this game of halma with Mr. Winship now," she added in brisk, matter-of-fact tones, "and Martha has some dinner for you in the dining-room. Martha is the most delightfully comforting person; she has cheered me immensely."

Mr. Northbrook pressed Lesley's hand. "Forgive me," he begged, "I am so grateful to you."

He murmured something brokenly about his anxiety, and Lesley followed him to the dining-room and left him to Martha's care. Martha was such a familiar, substantial fact, in her decent black gown and with her air of irreproachable respectability, that for the moment she lightened Mr. Northbrook's anxiety.

"Well, Mr. Northbrook," she said cheerfully,

"I, for one, am very glad to see you. I remembered that you liked pea soup, so I've kept some good and hot for you, and there's fried bread crumbs to go with it. I don't recollect as you ever dined with us but once, and that day we had pea soup, and you passed the remark that you was very fond of it, and you had two helpings, and I was so pleased, for Miss Lesley had said pea soup were n't stylish, and had wanted clam broth."

"It was very good of you to remember, Martha," he said, taking his soup with the absent air of the man who would have forgotten to eat if he had not been reminded of it.

"I've steak next, good juicy tenderloin steak, none of your rump steak. It's wonderful, Miss Marian holding her own as she does," Martha remarked casually to the sideboard. "It shows what vitality she has, a real good constitution, in spite of her not being over strong. My grandmother had pneumonia twice after she was seventy, and she lived to be eighty-six and died of a fall."

"Marian's mother died of pneumonia," he said briefly.

"Oh," Martha ejaculated, dashed for the moment, but not permanently cast down, "but that is only on one side of the house. I think it is this way," she continued, "if our time has come, it has come, and if it has n't, it has n't; and I've a sure faith the Lord has a big work for Miss Marian to do in this world before she leaves it. So

don't you be a mite down-hearted, Mr. Northbrook."

"I can't help it, Martha. If I were to lose her" —

"Now, Mr. Northbrook, I don't expect you are going to lose her, but if you did you'd have Hal and Stephen and little Charlotte. I knew a widow woman who had four children and lost them all. Hal is real good-hearted, if he is tormenting, and Stephen is the most endearing little fellow, and Charlotte is the cutest young one."

"I know all that, Martha," he assented wearily, "but all the same Marian is the one thing I care for most, and I reproach myself for not having come before. If I had come before — but they said — they wrote" —

"Nothing could have made any difference, Mr. Northbrook, after she was once took sick. Miss Lesley made them get a nurse the first minute. Miss Lesley's shown considerable character, she's slaved day in and day out to keep things running smooth, and Miss Marian loved to have her round when the nurse allowed it."

"Miss Chilton has been most kind," he said absently.

When he joined Lesley and Mr. Winship in the parlor they were still playing halma. The anxious look had left his brother-in-law's face, and he exclaimed, "I am just on the point of beating her. She was far ahead of me, but I blocked up one of her men; it has been a most

exciting game. You will forgive us, I know, if we finish it; there is nothing like games to occupy the mind."

Mr. Northbrook picked up a newspaper and read without knowing what he was reading. Finally he flung it down and came and watched their game.

"It is ten minutes past nine; that is late for me," Mr. Winship said, when the game was over. "Good-night," and then he added, with sudden gravity that touched Lesley, "we'll hope for the best of news in the morning."

"I must say good-night, too," Lesley said, as Mr. Winship went upstairs. "Perhaps, Mr. Northbrook, you will be so kind as to see me to Mrs. Fraser's, where I am spending the nights."

"Must you go yet?" he asked wistfully. "It is early, but perhaps you are very tired."

Lesley thought of the first evening she had ever known him, when he begged her in such different tones to stay on deck a little longer. She had traversed a world of feeling since then.

"The moving finger writes, and having writ moves on," she said softly, in memory of that night.

"Why do you quote those ghastly lines?" he asked, with a little shiver.

He had wholly forgotten that he had once quoted them himself.

"The moving finger writes"—he murmured. "Good God, when one thinks of the inexorable-

ness of fate — or rather, of the stupid, senseless folly of our own acts! It is we who are responsible. We make our own fate. If I had only kept Marian with me this winter," he added, half to himself, "this would not have happened. I yielded against my better judgment."

Lesley raised her sad eyes to his.

"I should never forgive myself if it had been college that made her ill; it was a combination of circumstances that we could none of us foresee. You cannot blame yourself. If anyone is to blame, it is I. I ought to have come out here the first instant after I heard that Mrs. Winship had a cold. Oh, the stupid things we do, letting the petty crowd out the great."

"You must not blame yourself. No one could have been a truer friend than you have been."

For a time they sat together in silence, too much occupied with thoughts of Marian to need the medium of speech.

At last he said, "Everything she has ever done has always been beautiful. She has been a comfort from the first moment they put her into my arms. She was the dearest baby, she was so good and obedient, she did n't cry like the other children."

The tears came into Lesley's eyes. Her throat burned, she tried to control herself, but she was worn out with the strain of the last week. With a feeling of utter self-contempt for her own weakness, she buried her face in her hands, and putting

her head down on the sofa cushions, sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Miss Chilton," he said, recovering his self-command at sight of the loss of hers, "forgive me, I did n't think, you are always so calm" —

"Yes," she sobbed brokenly, "that is what everyone says. I have n't given up hope, you must n't think that, but I am so sorry, and I am tired; I have n't given way before Marian."

He came over and sat by her on the sofa, taking the hand that was nearest him and holding it close in his. She left it there unresistingly. Neither of them spoke, and gradually her sobs grew quieter. Life had narrowed down to one desire. She would be content to lose all personal happiness, if only Marian might get well.

"I must go," she said, sitting up at last and looking at him with eyes full of unspoken sympathy, "I must try to get a long night's sleep for Marian's sake. I am sorry to have behaved like this, when I meant to be a help."

"My dear child, nothing you could have done would have helped me so much," he said.

When Lesley woke the next morning, she had a confused sense of gladness, then with a quick, torturing revulsion of feeling she remembered Marian's danger. And yet, mingling with her great anxiety was a new sense of strength which made her feel it possible to bear grief. She had known the night before, as she sat with her hand in Mr.

Northbrook's, that whether it meant happiness or sorrow, henceforth her first thought would be for him. The freedom to lead her own life untrammelled, — what was the desire for that but a form of egotism no less great than Mr. Winship's because clothed in the more attractive garb of youth and strength? The passionate cry of her soul for another had brought her the knowledge of what life was to all who deeply love. As yet there was no happiness for her, merely the sense of absolute surrender of self. She was content to be secondary in Mr. Northbrook's life, and so intense was her sympathy that she cared for him the more because he loved his daughter best. If only Marian might be given back to him, she would ask nothing for herself!

When she came down a little after seven o'clock to go over to the Winships' for the day, she found Mr. Northbrook waiting at Mrs. Fraser's gate.

"I wanted you to know as soon as possible that she is still living," he said. "They sent me for the doctor at five o'clock."

"This is the critical day," Lesley said, with a steadiness of voice that surprised herself. "The doctor expects a change in the next twenty-four hours. If, when the turn in the fever comes, she has strength to rally, he thinks she will get well."

"I am sure he has given up hope now," Mr. Northbrook said. Lesley looked up at him quickly, and read in his face the signs of a night of agony greater than anything she had ever known.

"If the doctor has lost hope, there is all the more reason for us to keep up ours," she said.

"No," he returned wearily, "it is best to face the truth. They are giving her oxygen," he added presently. "She is too weak to hold the tube in her lips. They hold it near her mouth. I saw her. She knew me, and smiled, and seemed no more surprised to see me than if I were the nurse."

That day, as Lesley went about the house with hushed tread, now saying a few words of hope to Mrs. Winship, and then stealing to Marian's door, only to go away with a heavier heart; sometimes trying to soothe Mr. Winship, who at last had faced the future, and often stopping for a few hurried words with Mr. Northbrook, death seemed more real than life. Lesley's own despair when her aunt died came back to her, and the two years were bridged.

As the day passed, even Lesley gave up hope. When evening came she could not bear to leave, lest in the night the change should come. She told Martha that she could not go, but would be happier to sit up all night.

"Now Miss Lesley, you are not going to do anything of the kind. You never could stand losing your sleep. Of course you want to stay, and I've fixed my bed up for you with clean sheets, and the moment she is worse I'll call you, as sure as I am alive. You can go to sleep with an easy mind, for I've never deceived you yet. You can't do any good by staying up."

"But, Martha, you will get worn out if you don't get any sleep."

"Miss Lesley, I ain't one to neglect my health. I've got a good nine ounces of selfishness to the pound. I calculated this all out, and I slept three hours this afternoon."

"Oh, you dear!" said Lesley, throwing her arms about the old servant's neck.

Lesley went to bed strangely comforted. She did not think she could go to sleep, but after a brief vigil the next thing she knew the sun was shining in brightly at the one window of her room. She pulled her watch out from under her pillow and saw that it was ten minutes past eight. Full of indignation against Martha, she put on her slippers and flung on Mrs. Winship's wrapper. When she reached the head of the stairs, she saw Martha in the second story hall.

"Martha," she whispered, running down to her, "how is she? Why did you let me sleep so long?"

"She is better, Miss Lesley, the change has come. Her temperature dropped below normal, and they feared a collapse, but she's all right now. The doctor thinks she is going to pull through. Blessed be hot water bags, and blessed be whiskey, if I am a temperance woman!"

XXVIII

THE LAST DAY

SATURDAY when the doctor came he said he considered Marian out of danger, unless something unforeseen occurred. Sunday was Mr. Northbrook's last day in Cambridge, as he was to take the midnight train to New York. Lesley had not seen him alone for more than a few minutes at a time in the last eventful days, and usually if he were with one of the Winships she was with the other. Nevertheless, the whole house seemed full of his presence, and life a thing of delight; for Marian was going to get well. Neither her father nor Lesley was allowed to see her as yet. Lesley hoped that she and Mr. Northbrook might take a long walk this last morning. She did not look forward to any change in their relation at present. She was entirely happy, knowing that he cared for her and that their friendship was now established on the firmest foundations.

When she came in late to breakfast, she found Mr. Northbrook had gone up to sit with his sister.

"My dear Miss Chilton," Mr. Winship said, as he chipped his egg, "I have ordered the carriage to take me to old Christ Church this morning, where Washington worshiped, and I shall esteem it the greatest favor if you will accompany

me. I am sure you will enjoy the old historic edifice, and since my illness I have not been accustomed to going anywhere alone."

Poor Lesley! Her dream of an out of door morning was rudely shattered.

Before Mr. Northbrook came down, she had promised to go to church with her host.

"It is such a beautiful morning, I was wondering if you would not like a walk somewhere in the country," Mr. Northbrook said to Lesley, when they met in the parlor. "It is my last day, and I feel like spending it out of doors."

"Henry, aren't you going to church?" Mr. Winship asked reproachfully.

"Not on a morning like this."

"I am going to church with Mr. Winship," Lesley said.

The glad, eager look in Mr. Northbrook's face died out, and a certain frigid stiffness took its place. "That is very nice," he said.

"Won't you go to church with us?" Mr. Winship asked. "I cannot offer you a seat in the carriage, for it is to be the coupé, but you might meet us there."

"Thank you, I don't care to go to church. I'll go and take a long walk."

Was their whole day to be spent at cross-purposes? It seemed incredible to Lesley that any intelligent being could think her indifferent to a walk on such a morning, but this, astounding as it was, seemed Mr. Northbrook's idea.

"There is the afternoon," Lesley suggested. "Could n't you stay with Mrs. Winship this morning, and could n't we go to walk this afternoon?"

There was an instant illumination of Mr. Northbrook's countenance. "Yes, if you really want a walk," he said.

"Of course I want one."

Mr. Winship went upstairs to see his wife, and Mr. Northbrook added, "My brother-in-law is too good a churchman to play games on Sunday, so you need n't feel you are deserting your post."

"I would go even if it were a week day," she said.

Lesley was not in a church-going mood. Inwardly she was in a state of hot revolt all the way there, but she was outwardly sympathetic, doing her best to allay Mr. Winship's fears concerning the driver, who was not their usual staid Patrick.

Once inside the old church, however, its dignity and beauty, and a certain flavor of the past, appealed to her. Personally her heart was with the congregation next door, for she liked their simpler form of worship.

Lesley and Mr. Winship sat in a little pew on the left, close by the door, in case he did not feel well enough to sit through the whole service. For the first ten minutes, she rebelled at having to be there. It was going to be a long service, she could see, with a great deal of ritual; then some one slipped quietly in at their pew door, and turning, Lesley saw Mr. Northbrook. The color flooded

her face with a glad rush, she dropped her eyes on her prayer-book, and all at once she loved better to be in that quiet church than anywhere in the world; and with the force of a great revelation she knew that wherever he was her heart would feel at rest.

There was no more devout worshiper in all that congregation than Lesley of an alien faith. Her heart was overflowing with thanksgiving because Marian was going to get well, and with humble gratitude that she herself was in this marvelous world, — a world where sorrow and joy succeeded each other with bewildering rapidity; a world with such dark shadows that there were moments when one was tempted to doubt the final good; and yet a world with such exquisite happiness that one would face sorrow and death for the sake of it. Lesley glanced at Mr. Winship's bowed head, and a wave of compassion surged over her. For him the gladness of the world was forever dulled; but even for such broken lives there must be sudden lightning flashes to illuminate the darkness; and his love for his wife and hers for him were the greatest compensation. Lesley looked beyond him to Mr. Northbrook, at the end of the pew, and something in his reverential attitude made her sure that he was "a countryman of the Sabbath," in spite of his lack of definite creed.

The long service was over; the last of the many choir boys had wound his sinuous way out of the chancel, and the great congregation began to stir.

"It is a beautiful church," Mr. Winship said. "I don't know whether it was red and blue in Washington's time. It was a different color in my college days. Whether this is a restoration or merely a piece of modernity, I do not know. I really bore the strain of sitting here so long and listening to the sermon remarkably well, thanks to you, my dear Miss Chilton; there is something health-giving in your mere presence."

"There is," said Mr. Northbrook.

"Who ever imagined anything so beautiful as this?" said Lesley that afternoon, as she and Mr. Northbrook stood on the edge of the woods at Arlington Heights and glanced towards the city in a smoky haze.

"I am glad you like it. Marian did. We came here one day last winter. Those brown fields make me think of your Tschaikowsky Symphony," he added abruptly.

"Mine?" she questioned gayly.

"Ours, if you like it better. I heard it this winter in New York. Some one has compared it to a turnip field in autumn. When I first heard you play it, I thought of autumn; none of your flaming red and yellow autumns, but a sombre, russet autumn, not wholly sad, and never glad, like middle-age in the average man's life, call it my life, if you like to be definite."

"And your life seems to you like that?" she asked softly.

"It did. I was content with my sober, quiet-toned turnip field, knowing nothing better, and thinking it good to have lived beyond the fierce struggles of youth; and, all of a sudden, a flash of sunlight came over it, — you know the place where those glad notes come in, — and looking up I saw coming through a gate in the wall that bounded my turnip field, a girl in a white gown. The white gown had caught all the sun, and the whole place seemed changed. It was you, you who had wandered into my turnip field as confidently as if you belonged there by right."

"How very high-handed of me. And it was imprudent to be going about in November in a white gown."

"You were never noted for prudence. At first I thought of ordering you out. I was used to the quiet and peace of my turnip field. I did not like it invaded, and you took me to your side of the wall where there was an old-fashioned garden full of poppies and sweet peas and marigolds, hollyhocks, geraniums — don't interrupt me, I know you are going to say it is n't customary for those flowers to blossom in November, — you lived in fairyland, and in fairyland all things are possible. After I had stayed with you for a time I found my turnip field a little dreary, and I wanted to take down the wall, but you would n't let me."

"I came over quite often. November always has a charm for me, and I like turnips."

"Do you really mean that?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes, the turnip is one of my favorite vegetables."

"I might have known you were n't in earnest."

They walked through the woods for a time, talking fitfully, and equally happy whether they were talking or silent. At last he said, "This is the very spot where Marian and I stood that afternoon, looking down the wood-path, and I said I felt as if we caught a glimpse of Happiness at the other end. She plays us sorry tricks, the jade! It is only a few days since I felt I should never again have a moment's happiness. Then I said that if Marian only got well I should ask for nothing more. How quickly we change! Now that I am easy about her I have gone back to all my old longings."

"What do you want?" she asked.

"What do I want? I want you."

"But you have me. Here I am. We shall be friends always."

"Yes, thank Heaven! But we shall have to say good-by to-night. I feel as if I could n't bear to put an end to this."

"So do I," she confessed.

He stopped abruptly, and looked at her with a glance full of suppressed feeling.

"If you feel so too," he said rapidly, "there is a very simple way of avoiding these good-bys."

Something in the passionate entreaty of his voice made her step back, as if in recoil from a physical shock. She was breathless, and for one moment she

longed still to keep the wall up that was between them. Their friendship afforded her such complete happiness that she half dreaded any change. He misinterpreted her withdrawal, and the light faded out of his face. A moment before he had looked radiantly happy, and almost boyishly young. Now his face seemed older and very sad.

"I don't wonder you don't want it," he said. "You have everything to lose, I everything to gain. If I were younger and as free as other men, I would make you care for me so much that you could n't live without me."

Lesley, with outstretched hands, swiftly crossed the strip of road that divided them. "You have," she said.

So rapidly does the mind accustom itself to any natural change that Lesley, before the evening was over, was wondering how she could have been so blind as to have deferred her wonderful happiness for so many months. When she looked across at Mr. Northbrook she could not understand how Mr. Winship could sit there talking so unsuspectingly, for it seemed to her as if her lover's joy was so legible that those of defective vision might read it. But not even the astute Martha nor the sympathetic Mrs. Winship had divined their secret, for the most unselfish of us is wrapped about with a veil of egotism; and Martha's overdone potatoes and the Winships' interest in the book they were reading blurred their penetration.

It was when Mr. Northbrook and Lesley were eating their belated supper, and listening to Martha's alternate fault-finding and apologies, that a sense of blissful content came to them both. One cannot always stay on the heights, but when the lowliest valleys seem equally desirable, it is an augury for future good.

"I can't help smiling when I think how uncharacteristic your conduct is," Mr. Northbrook said, later in the evening, in a blessed interval when Mr. Winship had gone upstairs to bid his wife good-night. "And what will your suffrage friends say? Mrs. Madison, for instance?"

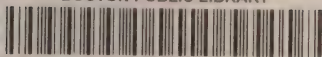
"My conduct is n't half so uncharacteristic as yours," she returned, "for I shall keep on believing in suffrage and working for it to the end of the chapter, and you are proposing to countenance such a pernicious firebrand. You had better pause, before it is too late."

"I did pause, but it was too late," he said.

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